How "Modest Jim" Won the $50 Prize

By WILLIAM LAWRENCE
Author of "The Awakening"

"YES—I remember why they call the Big Boss 'Modest Jim,'" said the Old Timer. "It started way back twenty years ago.

"I was in my third apprentice year when Jim Hadley came to work here—a quiet, bashful boy. His father had died and he was forced to leave grammar school and go to work.

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"One day Old Man Adams, who owned this outfit in those days, came out into the shop and tacked up a sign over the foreman's desk.

"It seemed that the Old Man and his designer had run into a stone wall or what was Greek to most of us kids those days, and was offering a prize of fifty dollars to anyone who solved the problem. He must have been up against it or he never would have asked our bunch for help.

"About two weeks later, after the rest of us had forgotten all about it, the Old Man rushed out to Jim and fairly pushed five crisp ten dollar bills into his hand. He had solved the problem.

"When the foreman asked him how he did it, he replied, 'Oh, it wasn't anything great. Only a fresh brain on a stale subject.' That's all he ever said about it. But do you know what that boy had been doing? He'd been studying with the International Correspondence Schools in his spare time. No wonder he got ahead!

"And he went right up, and up and up, until today he is the Big Boss. And the rest of us are just about where we started. He's still 'Modest Jim,' but he's earning five times as much as I am.

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Sept. 10th, 1922

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Volume 36
Number 4

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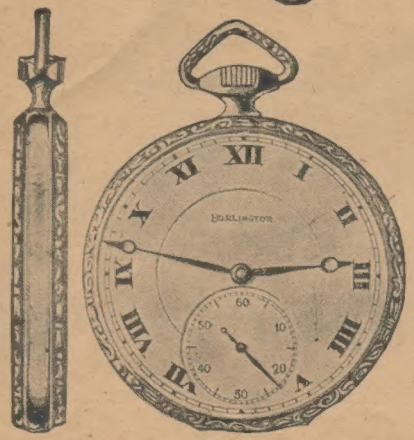

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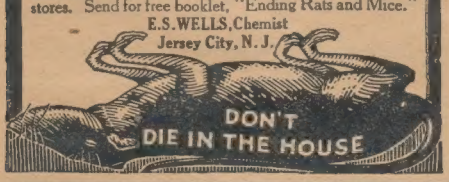

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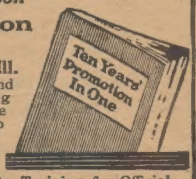

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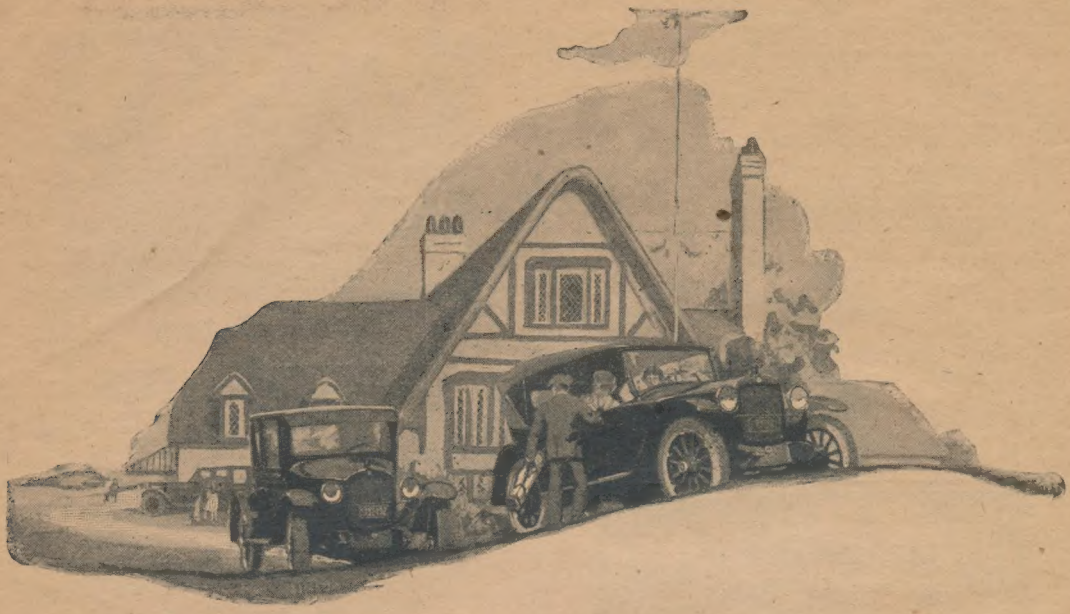

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SEPTEMBER 10th ISSUE, 1922
VOL. XXXVI No. 4

ADVENTURE

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THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

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Cover Design . . . . . **James McKell**

IN 1861 the Territory of Nevada was a hot-bed of card-sharps and gamblers, legal sharks and gun men. The ownership of a silver ledge was a graver cause for dispute than the Civil War, and, more often than not, the claim passed into the hands of the side employing the best gunmen. "OVER THE RIM OF THE RIDGE," a four-part serial by Hugh Pendexter, will start in the next issue.

WHEN three men—wrecked in the arctic regions—discover an ancient Dutch vessel loaded with liquor, things begin to happen. Especially as one of the men was an ex-bartender, and one an ex-street-preacher. "FREEDOM'S LAST STAND," a complete novelette by Norman Springer in the next issue.

VIGILANTES, claim-jumpers and gunmen pitted against a gambler who, when there is good cause, deals for life or death as readily as for chips. "KING HIGH," a complete novelette, by F. R. Buckley, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

Adventure
Sept. 10th 1922
Vol. XXXVI No. IV

MOSES and Mrs. AINTREE

A Complete Novel

by Talbot Mundy

Author of "The King in Check," "A Secret Society," etc.

CHAPTER I

"We can reconstruct the whole of human history."

WELL, you know how the firm of Grim, Ramsden & Ross had its beginnings. We have had to use all our wits to save ourselves from being used by one government against another; rivals for political power have tried to employ us for their own ends; and have succeeded more than once. You'd need the brains of an archangel and Satan combined to see through all the proposals that get brought to us. But there's reasonable money in it, and it's good fun; we've cracked a hard-boiled egg or two, and spilled some beans.

Strange gave Grim sole charge of the Near-East end, purchased Narayan Singh's discharge from the army, and left the two of them in Cairo, planting Jeremy in London.

Strange and I went to the States, where, with the aid of his old office staff, we hammered through the organizing and incorporation; and while we were in the middle of all that, the first "view forward" came over the wires from Grim. Strange was in Washington.

Meet John Brice New York S. S. *Olympic*. O.K. follow up. Grim.

I boarded the *Olympic* along with the pilot away outside Sandy Hook. It was early morning, but Brice was pacing the deck with a companion, and I observed them both for several minutes after a steward had told me who they were.

Brice was short with a close-clipped gray beard, wiry, dried out, and resolute-looking.

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He stepped forward gamely with a decided limp, and made way for other people apparently unconsciously. I guessed his age between fifty and fifty-five.

His companion was about two inches taller, angular and lean, a Scot whichever way you viewed him; a fellow with one of those noses that warn you not to waste persuasion on him, he'll decide for himself. He had heavy, sandy-colored eyebrows, broad shoulders, and a sort of side-swing that went with them. He wore a heather-colored Highland tam-o'-shanter, and a small leather bag slung over his shoulder by a strap. The steward told me his name was Allison, and that he had shared Brice's stateroom on the voyage.

I introduced myself, and Brice chose one of those leather-upholstered corners in the smoking-room, and curled himself up cross-legged, staring at me frankly and fairly. He made no effort to disguise the fact that he was making an inventory of my pros and cons. His companion, seated next to him, did the same, perhaps not quite so sympathetically.

"We met Grim in Cairo," Brice began at last. "Allison and I are Egyptologists; we've been nineteen years in Egypt on behalf of the British Museum. The Egyptian law as regards antiquities is strict, and no kind of excavating is allowed without a permit, which is only granted to representatives of such institutions as the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of New York, and so on. All discoveries have to be reported, and nothing may be removed from the spot without permission in writing.

"Allison and I have specialized in the period during which the Israelites were in Egypt, with particular reference to Moses. Very little is known about Moses, historically speaking. In the biblical account not even the name is given of the Egyptian princess who is said to have discovered him among the reeds. It was our purpose, if possible, to throw light on all that period, establishing as many facts as might be——"

"And exploding a number of absur-r-d traditions," put in Allison. "We've disproved more than ye'd imagine possible."

"We have established the fact definitely that Moses did exist," Brice continued. "Whether or not one man wrote the Decalogue; whether or not one individual led that horde of Israelites and established the ten commandments and the law, we have proved that Moses did exist. He lived at a time that corresponds roughly with that of the Israelitish colony in Egypt. Our proofs, however, are missing."

"Do you expect to find them in New York?" I asked. "You'll find Moses' family is not extinct."

"Our quest has nothing to do with Jews," Brice answered. "The most astonishing thing about the Jewish race is their indifference to the monuments of their own past. Allison and I discovered a temple in which Moses undoubtedly studied that 'learning of the Egyptians' with which he is credited, we found the symbols and insignia that he used in the performance of the secret rites. Those have been stolen, and it might occur to you that Jews would be the logical people on whom suspicion should rest. But Jews have nothing whatever to do with it.

"We kept our discovery secret. It was so important, and the finds themselves were of such intrinsic value that it seemed wisest to close up everything until we could confer with the proper authorities regarding the disposal of what could be easily removed.

"ONE of our staff was an Abyssinian, an individual named Gulad, who had been educated in America. He had served us faithfully for nine or ten years, and you know the proverb, 'If a comrade in arms is what you need, buy a Nubian slave; if you want to grow rich, buy an Abyssinian'; that fellow Gulad was the finest steward of resources that we ever had. Nothing escaped his notice. Nobody—not even a desert Bedouin—could steal from him, and he was sufficiently educated to appreciate the importance of antiquities, aside from the mere price they might bring in the open market.

"We had entered the temple through a hole in one corner of the wall after tunneling through sand for more than a hundred yards, shoring up the tunnel with timber as we went. Most of the important finds were in a great stone chest weighing several tons, almost the exact counterpart of the so-called sarcophagus in the King's Chamber in the Great Pyramid, only having a lid that fits tightly in place. The chest in the Great Pyramid has no lid.

"Whatever had been found outside the

stone chest we placed inside it except for one small item. Then, with the aid of Gulad and ten men, we lifted the lid back, cemented up the breach we had made in the temple wall, pulled down about a dozen cross-pieces of timber from the roof of our tunnel, so as to let the sand fall in and close the passage against thieves, and came away, leaving Gulad on the spot in charge."

"Ye understand," put in Allison, "we never mistrusted Gulad for a minute."

"Never for a minute," Brice agreed. "He was as enthusiastic as ourselves. He used to sit and talk with us in the evenings, displaying an intricate knowledge of Bible history. He had theories of his own on a number of things that have puzzled antiquarians. He could read hieroglyphics. We used to give him worn and broken inscriptions to decipher, and he had a fair average of success with them."

"Aye, we were well taken in," said Allison. "We might ha' known it's not in the nature of an honest black man to be receiving letters from all quarters of the globe."

Brice laughed.

"It never occurred to us to ask what his voluminous correspondence was about. Now and then we'd see him writing until long after midnight in his tent by candle-light."

"We'd see his shadow on the side of the tent, ye understand," put in Allison. "We respected his privacy exactly as if he were a white man like ourselves."

"Well," Brice continued, "we left Gulad in charge, and took the train for Cairo. That meant a day on camel-back before we reached the railway, and a day and a night in the train. When we reached Cairo Galbraith, the official we had to see, was away, and we had to wait three days for him.

"When Galbraith returned—he arrived at midnight, and we kept him up all that night talking, though he was tired out—he thought our news so important that he made up his mind to return with us and have our find uncovered in his presence. That meant more delay. One way and another, it was eleven days after our departure before we arrived with Galbraith at sunset, tired and hungry on the scene of our excavations. The camp had completely disappeared! There did not remain one trace of it!"

"Nothing to eat! Nowhere to go!" said Allison.

"No lanterns or candles—nothing but a box or two of matches—no servants, except the two Arabs who had come with us to look after the camels we rode—no firearms—not a word of explanation. Nothing but Egyptian darkness, and the black mouth of a tunnel leading underground! We slept in the tunnel that night."

"Speak for yourself!" remarked Allison dryly.

"When morning came there was a little dim light down the tunnel, for it points due eastward, and for a short while the rising sun penetrates almost to the end. We saw then that the tunnel was not as we had left it. The overhead beams had been replaced, the loose sand carried out, and then three beams had been removed again to let sand once more block the tunnel. In other words, somebody had paid a visit to our find.

"It was three more days before we could get together another gang and dig through to our temple. The digging took another whole day and then we saw that whoever had paid the visit in our absence hadn't taken the trouble to reset the masonry. The hole yawned as wide as if we'd never blocked it up, and nearly all the stones were pushed inside the building."

"I examined the cement at once," said Allison. "The masonry had been broken down before our backs were turned. That put outside conspir-racy out of the question. There was only one man who knew enough and had intelligence enough to dig straight to the spot and use crow-bars before the cement was dry. It was Gulad's doing."

"Be that as it may," said Brice, "we proceeded to examine the temple. It's a wonderful temple——"

"Per-r-fect!" exclaimed Allison. "The pattern and inspiration of the chastity of later Greek design! But we'll not bore ye with technicalities. Proceed."

"Nothing in the main hall had been touched," said Brice. "We entered the smaller priests' chamber at the rear, in which we had discovered the great stone chest; and I told you how we had replaced the lid. That lid weighed a ton. It was set leaning against a wall. The stone chest was empty. Absolutely empty!"

"Man, ye'd have wept!" said Allison. "There were portraits done on gold of thir-r-ty-two initiates of the mystery, with their names inscribed; and beneath each portrait

was writing of a kind never before unearthed in an Egyptian temple. Do ye know Sanskrit? Look at this. This is the single item we took with us that convinced Galbraith he'd better come back with us."

Allison undid his leather satchel and unwrapped from tissue paper a rectangular gold plate, about nine inches by six and more than a quarter of an inch in thickness. Its weight was prodigious. One side was entirely covered with writing etched into the soft metal. Allison laid that side downward on the table, and bade me consider the obverse.

"Don't touch! That's Moses!" he said, sitting back to enjoy the expression of my face.

THE gold had been cut away smoothly to leave a portrait of a man in high relief. My previous mental picture of Moses had been taken from the cover of a school atlas. I imagined a man with whiskers like those of the man of Liskeard in the limerick, breaking in his fury two stone tablets by the light of lightning, and kicking over a golden calf, while crowds of Israelites prostrated themselves in terror before him.

The picture I had in mind of him was gigantic—six or seven times as big as other men—clothed in a thing like a purple bathrobe and with his toes sticking out from sandals that suggested seven-league boots.

This man had Jewish features subtly modified to pass Egyptian scrutiny. The beard was trimmed and curled like those of the statues of Pharaoh, and the headdress was the linen one of ancient Egypt, including the jeweled brow-band shaped like a snake.

Yet it hadn't been done by an Egyptian artist. You could easily recognize the touch of an Indian hand, betrayed by the skill with which the folds of cloth were handled and a kind of alive, compassionate humanity that the Egyptians never tried to picture—having none.

It was a face that you could stare at by the hour—attracting—fascinating—nothing repellent about it—amazing. It expressed not only humor, but the whole great cycle of the virtues, including wisdom. Not wisdom as the Egyptians represented it, static and cold. Wisdom that was so entirely wise that it could sympathize, and laugh with instead of at. I've never seen anywhere a face like that one, done in gold in Pharaoh's day.

"Can ye read Sanskrit?" demanded Allison. "That first line below the picture reads—

Moses, son of Amram, an Initiate inducted to these Mysteries at the appointed time.

"The lines below that and on the reverse are the words of a hymn rather closely resembling the *Rig Veda*, but with significant changes that suggest parts of the first chapter of *Genesis*. It's conclusive proof that all known religion had its origin in India, as the Indians have always maintained. It proves that the man Moses was a living fact, and *ergo* that there's at least some truth in the legends attached to his name.

"Man!" he exclaimed excitedly. "D'ye realize that that Sanskrit may be Moses' actual handwriting? That he may have done it himself with a sharp tool after the Indian whoever he was had finished the likeness! D'ye appreciate what that means? If we can get back the thirty-one others that Gulad the Abyssinian stole we can reconstruct the whole of human history!"

Well, there we were, steaming through the Narrows into New York harbor with a yellow quarantine flag at the mast-head, staring at a portrait of Moses, who crossed the Red Sea without half as much mechanism to assist him and no steam at all. We were possibly handling a piece of gold that Moses actually touched.

"It's wonderful," I said. "I hope you succeed in catching Gulad and recovering the things he stole. But I don't believe this is a case that our firm would care to handle. You should try the regular detective agencies."

"Wait while we tell you the rest of it!" Brice answered. "It'll be hours yet before the port authorities let us land."

CHAPTER II

"MOSES MILES"

PASSENGERS began invading the smoking-room, but nobody interfered with us.

"It wasn't too late to preserve the temple," Brice resumed. "Galbraith sent for a police guard, after we had once more blocked up the entrance, and the three of us

returned to Cairo to see what could be done."

"There are two ways of getting anywhere in Egypt—the railway and the Nile. They're both easy to police," said Allison. "If we had acted when we fir-r-st discovered the theft, the police might have——"

"I've had dealings with Gyppy policemen," I interrupted. "The size of the bribe is the only question. How did Grim get wind of this?"

"The heads of departments did their best," said Brice. "But all the subordinates are Gyppies, and the Gyppies haven't learned anything in forty years. The police didn't lose the trail, because they never as much as pretended to pick it up. They said it was a mystery, and shrugged their shoulders."

"And meanwhile," said Allison, "we had to submit to sar-r-castic r-remar-r-ks from men who never found more than imitation scarabs in second-century tombs, if ye know what that means."

"At last we had a talk with the High Commissioner," Brice resumed. "It was he who suggested our seeing Grim about it."

"Ye've a genius in that man Grim," said Allison. "We found Mr. Grim's quarters in Cairo occupied by a Sikh named Narayan Singh, who said he was Grim's confidential assistant. He asked us for the story, and—you know how they bring you coffee in Egypt at the least excuse? Well, almost before I'd started a servant brought in coffee. He didn't seem to know any English; when I asked him in English for some cold water he didn't understand me. But instead of leaving the room after serving coffee the man squatted on the mat by the door and went into a sort of day-dream.

"When I'd finished telling the story to Narayan Singh, the servant collected the coffee cups and left the room. I asked if that was another of Grim's confidential assistants.

" 'Why, no,' the Sikh answered. 'That is Jimgrim sahib himself!'

"He came in presently in European clothes and apologized, explaining that we had caught him unawares, and that for the sake of practise he habitually stood and faced even little, unimportant emergencies. As he wisely remarked, big events are only little ones projected on a larger scale."

"Mon, the mon's a genius!" said Allison.

"Fortunately for us he knows the Near East like a book," Brice continued. "He analyzed what we had given him and boiled it down to the essential fact that Gulad is an Abyssinian, who was educated in the U. S. A. He found other Abyssinians in Cairo, and discovered that most of them regarded Gulad as a religious heretic, or backslider or something. Following that trail, Grim took a quick trip to Jerusalem, where there is an Abyssinian church. He was gone four days and returned with a light in his eye. Those Abyssinians had told Grim all they knew about him."

"That's the beauty of releegion," explained Allison. "Ye've always a thousand coreleegionists getting ready to expose ye at the proper time."

"Well, it seems that after Gulad's return from the United States he became a minor official of that Abyssinian church in Jerusalem. However, the seniors were jealous of him. He had studied Mormonism in the U. S. A., with particular reference to its success along business lines; and he pointed out that the colored people in the U. S. A. would prove a fertile field for propaganda of the sort he had in mind. But they turned him down; and the more he argued, of course, the more points he provided them on which to denounce him as a heretic."

"Ye see," explained Allison, "all novelty is heresy, new ways of getting rich included."

"At any rate, they turned him out of the church," said Brice, "and between that time and the day when he joined us he made various unsuccessful efforts to become a religious leader.

"Your friend Grim's reasoning was marvelous. He said to me that he considered one point obvious. 'If this fellow Gulad were a petty grafter, he would have stolen from you long ago. But he didn't steal. He has had charge of your petty cash for years, and actually saved you lots of money. If he were a petty grafter he might try to sell a goose that should lay golden eggs. Being a patient schemer, he'll set that goose to laying eggs instead. He'll play for power. You remember the plates of gold that the Mormons are said to have?' That was all Grim said to me for several days."

"But ye'll recall no doubt that I said things to ye," said Allison. "Ye'll remember my mentioning a per-r-fect catalogue o' new religious movements started by some chiel possessing a relic."

Brice ignored the interruption.

"Grim discovered in Jerusalem that Gulad's heresy, for which the Abyssinian elders excommunicated him, hinged on his interpretation of the law of Moses. That's important in the circumstances, Gulad has in his possession thirty-one gold plates covered with ancient writing, each of them bearing a portrait of a contemporary of Moses, and found in a temple in which Moses officiated. Even if he can't read Sanskrit, which is a practical certainty, he can show them to ignorant people and interpret them to suit his plans."

"And it becomes in consequence a verra reasonable theory," said Allison, "that Gulad entered our service because he knew we were sear-r-ching for evidence of Moses' actual existence. He persisted for about nine years. Ye can't restrain a measur-r-e of admir-r-ation for the r-rascal's deliber-r-ate per-r-tinacity."

"I still don't see where Grim, Ramsden and Ross enter into it," I said.

"Grim saw at once. You'll see presently," said Brice. "Just listen. Grim pursued his inquiries day and night, not overlooking the important point that Gulad was educated in the U. S. A. He made another flying trip to Jerusalem, and this time I went with him.

"THERE was an American woman in Jerusalem, about whom nobody knew much. She was posing as a woman of wealth and making a clever display with what small private means she had. You know how a certain sort of enthusiast worships the very stones of Jerusalem? Well, she was that kind. But she seemed to want to own Jerusalem.

"Grim and I called on her after making a few inquiries. The U. S. consul knew more than he cared to tell, for in answer to Grim's questions he merely pursed his lips and shook his head. One or two Americans declared she was a rank impostor, but that was very likely personal pique. She was apparently more of a social climber than a politician. Impostor hardly seemed the right word.

"She was living in a pretty good house outside the city walls that she had coaxed from the Administration at a low rent. She had a way of worshiping a handsome British officer that some of them couldn't easily resist.

"Forty, I should say she is—forty-two—somewhere around that age. A big, handsome woman with unusual blue eyes and fine teeth. She had quite a household—four or five men and women from the States—nonentities, who did her bidding meekly. They seemed to consider her almost as important as she thought herself, and it was from a very mild, hen-pecked-looking man of sixty that Grim learned an important point while we waited in the sitting room. She kept us waiting. She is the kind of person who does that.

When she came down at last Grim had pumped the hen-pecked person dry, and after a few of the usual banalities about the weather and the Zionists Grim mentioned the name of a mutual acquaintance in Cairo. The personage being rather important she claimed to know him better than she really did, which suited Grim's purpose exactly. In that apparently purposeless way of his he touched on the subject of her home town somewhere in West Virginia and said untruthfully that the mutual acquaintance had told him that she was the leader of quite an important sect there. According to Grim, this mutual acquaintance had said that in West Virginia Isobel Aintree was a name to conjure with. It was the hen-pecked person who had said that really.

"She was visibly disturbed, but walked straight into the trap. He had touched her vanity. She couldn't resist showing off. She had never mentioned this sect of hers to anybody in Jerusalem, but once she was under way Grim wouldn't let her stop. He pretended to find it the most interesting subject in the world, and under his fire of questions she admitted rather vaguely that her teaching was based on the Law of Moses.

"She came down finally under his persistent questioning to the bald fact that her sect has twenty-seven white adherents, and several hundred colored, none of whom were with her in Jerusalem. She said she felt that her mission in life was to benefit the colored people and she had hopes that the sect would grow. That brought up the subject of Gulad.

"She admitted that she knew Gulad. She had received correspondence from him. She had met him in Egypt on her way to Palestine. Grim pinned her down again by saying he knew Gulad intimately.

He spoke rather as if Gulad were somebody whom only discerning people knew how to appreciate, and the rather subtle flattery of that proved too much for her discretion. She admitted that Gulad's correspondence had provided the main incentive for her journey to Jerusalem. She had hoped with his assistance to make Jerusalem headquarters of a sect that would some day include hundreds of thousands of colored people in all quarters of the world.

"There was nothing superficially vicious about that, of course. Scores of people have tried the same sort of thing, and a few have succeeded. Most of them go to the wall sooner or later. It looked like a single case of personal ambition masquerading as divine fire. But Grim asked her quite casually when she had seen Gulad last, and her whole character lay bare that instant.

"She wanted to lie, but that hen-pecked person was watching her as if pearls of price were pouring from her lips. She hesitated palpably, flushed red, tried to laugh it off, and floundered:

" 'Really, Mr. Grim, I'd rather not answer that question. I must ask you to excuse me.'

"From the look on his face you'd have thought Grim was shocked by the very idea of being inquisitive. She hinted it was time to go, but he sat still and flattered her a little more. That woman can eat up flattery like a furnace swallowing coal. He said that he should think she was the very woman to make something of Gulad.

" 'The fellow needs a guiding hand,' he told her. 'They say he has great plans. Do you know anything of them?'

"She flushed and refused to commit herself. Grim asked her how long she expected to remain in Jerusalem, and she answered that she felt her work in the holy city was about done; she might go at any time. Then we took our leave, and discovered that evening by asking questions all over the place that she was planning to leave for the States as soon as she could get passage.

"STILL, we hadn't really connected her up with Gulad. We merely had strong suspicions, amounting in Grim's case to intuition. We'd no ground on which to accuse her, and as Grim remarked, she was likely to be careful of herself. " 'She's the kind of person,' he said, 'who likes to save the world by making her followers take chances. She's a kind of spiritual politician. If an idea works, it's hers; if it fails, it's the other fellow's, and she'll be the first to blame him.'

"A great student of character is your friend Grim. Everything turned out the way he said it would.

"We went up to Headquarters and dropped a hint that she might be intending to smuggle antiquities out of the country, and then Grim thought of another idea:

" 'Gulad,' he said, 'isn't likely to trust that plunder to another's keeping. She's probably much too wise to risk being caught with the goods at present. If they're in "cahoots" (as he called it) there'll be some slick work done.'

"We went back to Egypt and searched the files of permits to travel and found to our astonishment that a passport had been issued to a man named Gulad, described as a French subject of Abyssinian origin, who had already left from Port Said by a steamer that called nowhere short of Boston. There was a warrant out; so we sent a cablegram and arranged to have Gulad arrested as soon as the ship reached port in about seventeen days' time. Now I'd have sat down and waited after that, but Grim didn't. He inserted a few lines in the newspaper, and sent a marked copy to Mrs. Isobel Aintree in Jerusalem. Also, he tipped off all the customs officials to keep a bright look-out, and arranged by telegraph to have word sent to us of all her plans. You see we thought she'd have to engage passage and apply for a travel permit.

"But that woman is a wily one. She had obtained her permit two months before, available for six months, entitling her to travel in any direction she pleased. She sent a man down to book tickets on the train for Egypt, and we got word of that within two hours, over the Government wire. Then, if you please, she shipped the bulk of her luggage by freight to the United States, including nothing in it, of course, that was objectionable, and left northward for Syria in two motorcars with her household. Didn't use the train at all on British territory!

"The Arab government had fallen, and the French had not yet secured control; there were no officials at the border to hold her up.

Once over the border she took train for Damascus, where the French were only too glad to put her on the train for Beirut with every facility for leaving Syria at once.

"The motor-cars were hired ones. When they returned from over the border the news was out. There were two separate accounts, from two drivers, and copies of both were wired to Grim; checking them up he reached the conclusion that a colored man, described as her *kavass*, who traveled with the party, might be Gulad. He went to Jerusalem in a hurry for the third time, and decided that the fellow certainly was Gulad; so the plot began to clear decidedly. Gulad was in her house when we first called on her! Another man traveling in Gulad's name had shipped from Port Said to the United States with a French passport; and that's the point that baffled us.

"You see, the original warrant for Gulad's arrest had been issued over the French consul's signature. When we went to the consulate again to ask to have the French authorities in Beirut arrest that whole party, Gulad included, we found ourselves in check-mate. The man in charge was a typical bureaucrat, who asked whether there were two Gulads. A warrant had already been issued. Gulad was on his way to Boston, where he would be arrested by the United States police. No man could possibly be in Beirut and on the high seas simultaneously, and therefore that he would not issue another warrant, because he did not propose to make himself absurd.

"Well, we tried to approach the French in Beirut more directly. But the cable was out of order. It is when international incidents are taking place. The overland wire by way of Palestine had been cut—by Bedouins, the French said; a coincidence that must have saved their censor a lot of trouble. The long and short of that was that Mrs. Aintree and her party, Gulad included, got clear away from Beirut. And in spite of all the ridiculous passport formalities at every frontier they contrived to cross Europe without our being able to learn which route they had taken until the information was too belated to be any use. So much for passports!

"We finally traced them to London, and Grim cabled to Jeremy Ross to pick the trail up there. He cabled back the same day to the effect that he had got in touch.

"MEANWHILE Grim's assistant, the Sikh Narayan Singh, proceeded on the assumption that Gulad could not be wholly without intimates after nine years in Egypt."

"That was my idea," explained Allison. "It appealed to my sense of the rideeculous that any man should ignore the cir-r-cumstance of Gulad having fr-r-equently received veesitors in camp; and the equally impor-r-tant cir-r-cumstance, that every one o' the veesitors was black. They used to spend days at a time in our camp. I was at some pains on more than one occasion to discover whether they were being enter-r-tained at our expense, and was gr-ratified as well as surpr-r-ized to ascertain that they paid their own footing.

"As long as he accounted in full for our stores and petty cash it was only reasonable to accord him the preevileges due to any self-respecting man. Nevertheless, the unprecedented meticulousness of his honesty—in such a land as Egypt, mind ye, with Brice and me not scr-r-upling to feed our own guests from the expedition's stores—aroused my curiosity. So I discussed the matter with Narayan Singh, and he and I together ar-r-ived at certain definite conclusions. However, ye were speaking, Brice. Continue."

"Well," said Brice, "Narayan Singh discovered quite a little colony of U. S. darkies, more or less distributed in Alexandria, Port Said and Cairo. Quite a number were sailors, who had deserted under your peculiar shipping law. Some were harder to account for on any theory of lawful activity, but they all seemed to eke out a living, and a few were prosperous. They were distinctly possessed of class-consciousness, mainly evidenced by insolence toward white men who chanced into contact with them.

"Among them were quite a number of the missionary-preacher type. Narayan Singh found at least a dozen who were living off the rest in fairly easy circumstances. Four or five seemed to be well educated, and at least one—a man named Moses Miles—had a bank account. I want you to notice that name Moses; it proved to be an important clue.

"We let Moses Miles carefully alone at first, and made a study of the others. It would not have been the slightest use for a white man to approach any of them. But their distrust and resentment, directed at

all white men, apparently made them all the more inclined to accept the confidence of the Sikh. I don't pretend to explain it, but there's the fact. They seemed to despise the native African, to loathe the white man, and to regard the Indian as a possible friend.

"Narayan Singh discovered that Moses Miles was preaching a new brand of religion among those darkies. His name, it appears, was not originally Moses, but Horatio Augustus. He changed it when he adopted the new creed. The doctrine hinges on Mosaic law, and every initiate into its mysteries has to change his first name to Moses. Only initiates are allowed to preach. Other members are known as aspirants, and their chief duty seems to be to contribute handsomely to the support of the initiates. But there is an intricate ritual that ——"

"Verra heathenish, abominable rites!" growled Allison, changing his position restlessly.

"— a ritual that is much too cleverly devised to have been worked out by Moses Miles, who possesses a dominant personality, and education of a kind, but no really high order of intelligence. Narayan Singh sought admission to the sect—People of Pisgah they call themselves. He failed, but he found out this: That these People of Pisgah through Moses Miles, were momentarily awaiting instructions from the United States, on receipt of which and accompanying funds four of their initiates and eight aspirants were to leave for South Africa and begin an intensive all-black campaign among the natives there—a campaign consisting of religion mixed with politics. And the interesting point is this: That the name of the great high-priestess whose orders they awaited is Isobel Aintree."

CHAPTER III

"A P. O. P. original charter member."

THAT liner had a clean bill of health, but did not proceed to her pier. There began to be indignation meetings wherever there was room for twenty passengers to get together. But I noticed my friend Casey of the Federal Secret Service.

Casey regards the public as a herd of silly sheep with goats distributed among the herd at intervals. Regarded in the main, he doesn't love them; but I suspect that like a good sheep-dog he would grow old before his time and die of sheer disgust if deprived of his job. And wherever Casey strolls with both fists in his pockets and a look of bland indifference on his round, red face, you may safely bet there are human wolves or goats to be "fixed to rights" as he describes it.

After an hour or two he strolled into the smoking room and noticed me.

"Where are you from this time?" he demanded, sitting down beside us. "China? Borneo?"

I told him, and came back with the obvious question.

"Oh, nothing much," said Casey. "We got our man. We'd no picture of him and didn't know what name he'd travel under, but he's locked in his stateroom now with a bull to keep him company. We'll be alongside in about an hour. I hear ye've gone into the detective business with Meldrum Strange. Ye look like it! My boy, ye'll have to learn never to look interested. Unless they're clever men who're making trouble it's not interesting at all and if they are clever ye can't afford to let 'em worry ye!"

"Judge for yourself," I answered. "This looks like a case for you, not me. You'll admit it's interesting and romantic."

"Then it certainly isn't for me! There's no romance in my business, Ramsden, my boy. I deal in card-indexes and photygraffs and thumb-prints. Romance looks pretty in the newspapers and the books o' Doctor Conan Doyle. But romance and crime don't mix, no more than the smell of onions mixes with ice-cream sodies. But I've an hour, and I'm willing to be amused. Which are ye going to do—talk elephants an' gold-mines, which I believe ye know about, or discuss this marvelous, romantic case with me like a hen discussing water with a duck?"

I preferred the farm-yard to the zoo, and made a start by introducing Brice and Allison.

"Now take his breath away," I said. "Produce the gold plate."

He studied it in silence for a minute.

"A picture of Moses, eh? I've seen Jews look like him. Take a stroll with me and I'll point out to ye twenty or thirty men who might have sat for that picture. I suspect ye've man-handled the thing so

that the thumb-prints are all overlaid. What's the writing all about? Some sort o' code? Have ye a key to it? It don't look to me like Yiddish."

Casey turned the plate over and over, holding it by the edges, for he regards thumb-prints as other men do first editions.

"Never mind," he went on. "Criminologically speaking, Moses is dead. How do ye propose to get this gold plate through the customs? Have ye declared it? Who's set a value on it?"

"We haven't declared it," Brice answered. "We have a permit authorizing us to take it out of Egypt in trust. Allison and I are personally responsible for it. Without this one we might find it difficult to identify absolutely the thirty-one others that were stolen, whereas with this——"

Casey whistled. He's a man of habit like the rest of us. The first bars of the last line of the chorus of a song that was beginning to grow whiskers in the war with Spain form his invariable, only war-cry—

"There'll be a hot time——"

"Have ye traced the thief over here? Ye'd better tell me all about it. Here, I'll slip it in me pocket, and ye'll have no trouble with the customs men. Which hotel? All right, I'll give it back to ye at the Waldorf this afternoon. I'll take good care of it. Now tell me all ye know."

Brice laughed; it might be a tall order to tell all he knew.

"Well," said Casey, "I understand ye've come after thirty-wan plates like this wan. 'Tis a big country, where there's room to hide such trifles."

"Trifles!" exploded Allison. "They're as impor-r-tant as Old Testament manuscripts."

"The —— you say! Have ye any idee who took them. That might help."

Brice mentioned Gulad's name.

"Gulad? Gulad? Let me think a minute. There was a man named Gulad. Let me see. Yes, I remember. We held him in Boston. Colored man. The English would send from Aygypt for him. He'll be sent back to where he came from. Ye can arrest him over there in Aygypt."

"Who cares about him?" snorted Allison. "We believe that the real Gulad is over here, and that either he or a Mrs. Isobel Aintree has the plates."

"Aintree? Aintree? Isobel Aintree? Where have I heard that name?" said Casey.

"Oh, yes. Go ahead; tell me some more."

His eyes had a harder, keener look.

"According to Mr. Ross, the representative in London of Grim, Ramsden and Ross, she returned to the United States by way of London, bringing the real Gulad with her, and also presumably those gold plates," said Brice.

"But how did Gulad get into the States?" Casey demanded.

"It seems he's a citizen. Gulad applied for in London, and obtained an American passport. The witnesses who identified him were Isobell Aintree and two of her followers who all swore to having known him for a number of years."

"Ah! It's easy when they've been naturalized," said Casey. "I haven't a doubt he landed safely, if he'd papers. Between you and me and that sideboard yonder, if the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D. C. was missing overnight, I'd suspect Mrs. Aintree as soon as any wan. She has a new religion, I believe, and wan's enough. Well, we're coming alongside. I'll say a word to the customs superintendent that'll save ye time."

HAVING seen Brice and Allison to the hotel, I went to the office, where I found two letters on top of the morning pile, one from Grim and the other from Jeremy. Grim's was short and to the point.

Confirming my wire, Brice and Allison are O. K. in all respects. *Re* theft, consult the federal police. Our interest consists in unearthing a conspiracy to control the colored races of the world. Headquarters in U. S. A. Will report Egyptian developments as fast as they occur, and await instructions. JAMES SCHUYLER GRIM.

Jeremy's, on the other hand, ran to ten or eleven pages, and included a humorously accurate description of Brice and Allison. He wrote:

There's a sort of colored revival, combining religion and politics and using a secret religious ritual to bind all the darkies together. Mrs. Aintree is perhaps the head of it, and she and Gulad are as thick as thieves. She seems to have a hold on him or else he has on her, I hardly know which. I don't know what they have done with the stolen plates.

There is a dusky bishop here—he calls himself an "initiate"—who undoubtedly has seen them. Calls himself Moses Johnson. He is from Baltimore, and the name on his passport is Charles Abraham Ulysses Johnson. He is preaching—since he saw the Aintree woman—about the return of Moses to lead all African peoples into a promised

land of their own; and he says that, whereas the law was written formerly on stone tablets, it is graven on gold plates now, together with portraits of the angels—thirty-one of them, he says; and he claims to know the name of every angel on the list. All the texts he uses in his sermons are from the Book of Exodus, and his favorite one seems to be the part about how the Israelites spoiled the Egyptians, looting all their gold and silver before they started for the promised land. Cable instructions.—JEREMY.

A little before three o'clock I called on Brice and Allison, who were discussing their prospects rather gloomily in a bedroom. Allison had made his mind up that my friend Casey was an impostor, who would melt down that gold plate and turn it into cash.

"In which case," he was saying as I entered the smoke-filled room, "you and I, Brice, are discr-r-edited and ruined men. Nor are we entitled to sympathy. We're simpletons."

Allison refused to be comforted by me. He had reached the stage of doubting everything and everybody.

"Mon, I know nothing at all about ye," he protested.

However, Casey came in presently, well pleased with himself, and laid the gold plate on the bed.

"I've a man I'd like ye to meet. Shall I bring him in?"

THERE appeared an undersized, wizened colored man, who stood in the door spinning a derby hat on one finger, eying us all nervously. He wasn't actually crippled, but produced the effect by shrugging himself up inside a blue serge suit a size or two too large for him. His white collar was about four sizes too big, and he had a thin neck like a tortoise's, all wrinkled horizontally as if he could lengthen or shorten it at will. What with gold-rimmed spectacles, white spats over brown shoes, and a big diamond ring, he was a strange enough apparition even for New York.

"You all wanted me?" he asked.

His voice was wistful. The expression of his mouth was somewhere between a smile and the beginning of a shout for help. He was bold, and yet fearful and suspicious, as one who has made up his mind to a course, but dreads the consequences.

"Come in. Stand there," said Casey, and the colored man obeyed. "Tell these gentlemen what your name is."

"They calls me Aloysius Jackson."

"Where are you from?" demanded Casey.

"Appleton, West Virginny."

"Live there all the time?"

"Mos' all the time."

"Belong to all the lodges in the place?"

"They ain't but one. I's soopreme, gran'——"

"Sure you are. How about religion, now? Member of any church in Appleton?"

"Sholy. The spirit o' man mus' be nutrified, Misto' Casey. I's a P. O. P. original charter member."

"What's P. O. P?"

"People o' Pisgah. Maybe you nevo heard. Folks has lots o' things they's ignorant about."

"Who runs that show?"

"Tain't no circus, Misto' Casey."

"We won't argue that. Who runs it?"

"It runs itse'f. De inspiration o' di Lo'd providin' tongues o' flame, it jes' nacherly spreads. We's not conscripted into limits. De P. O. P.——"

"Will pop, by thunder if you don't answer me! Who bosses the show? Who holds the money? Who gives orders?" Casey demanded.

"Missis Isobel Aintree is de Lo'd's appointed leader in this heah present dispensation, Misto' Casey. She's white folks."

Aloysius Jackson folded both hands in front of him and stood easy, apparently throwing one hip clear out of joint. It seemed that as far as he was concerned having "white folks" for a leader settled everything. Casey thought otherwise.

"Where is Mrs. Aintree?" he demanded.

"De Lo'd knows."

"So do you. In New York?"

Aloysius Jackson opened and shut his mouth, and his Adam's apple moved, but he said nothing.

"You've seen her this morning, haven't you?" said Casey.

"Misto' Casey, I's dumb. I's spiffically laid on not to make no mention o' the movements of de leader of de P. O. P. I claims privilege."

"All right," Casey answered. "Ever hear of jail? Ever been in Georgia?"

Aloysius Jackson's face underwent a subtle change of color and then set hard. Casey continued:

"Take a hold of yourself and think a minute! George Munroe, from Truckton, Georgia, won't go back for quite a while,

unless his ghost walks. You recall him? President of the Indaypindent order o' Something-or-other wi' weekly cash benefits attached. Misused the mails, and razored the Federal officer who went to arrest him. That coon talked. He was a great talker. He died talking. You weren't his secretary now, by any chance?"

Aloysius Jackson seemed to prefer not to enter the ranks of great talkers. He swallowed his Adam's apple, regurgitated it, and made no comment.

"You weren't the secretary who couldn't be found to give evidence at the trial, I suppose. Another name, o' course in those days, but as likely as not the identical same fingerprints. Name of Alexander Hammond in those days, I think. That wasn't you?"

"Oh no, no, no, Misto' Casey. You're grievously mistooken. That wasn't me at all."

"Uh-huh! You're not on your trial—yet. Take care and don't commit yourself."

"I shoh won't, Misto' Casey!"

"It 'ud be easy to prove. You'd get ten years."

"Statute o' limitations, Misto' Casey! I provokes that statute. I provokes it consequentially."

"Invoke the Monroe doctrine, if you want to," answered Casey. "You don't know the law, my son. But, as I said, don't commit yourself. The State Department won't be bothered with you, unless you get rambunctious."

"Mr. Casey, sah, I's the least rambunctiousest nigger 'at you all know."

"Got pinched the other day, though?"

"Yes, sah, Misto' Casey, Ah got 'rested, but Ah'm not guilty; no, sir."

"Loaded bones, and liquor on the side?"

"True 'nuff."

"Possessing counterfeited money, too, I think?"

"Yes, Misto' Casey, sah, that was indicted against muh, but Ah's the victim o' conspiracy. Ah's the goat, sah."

"Out on two thousand dollars. Who bailed you? Mrs. Aintree?"

"Yes, sah, that lady took compassion on mah predicative."

"Why did she do that?" asked Casey.

"Isn't I a charter 'riginal member o' the P. O. P., an' aren't she leader?"

"That's a part of her duties, eh?"

"A part o' her prerogmative, Misto' Casey, sah. She's de Lo'd's anointed, an' she acts the part, sah, to perfection. She certainly do indeed."

"You've nothing against her, eh?"

"Against de Lo'd's anointed? No, sah, Misto' Casey."

"You'd not be scared to have all her doings known?"

"Ah convokes privilege. De fust rule of the P. O. P. is not to break de ninth commandment o' Moses by bearin' witness against her doings."

"Do you know anything about her that would make you afraid to report her doings?"

"Ah do, sah. Ah'd be plumb skeered to report her doings."

"Why?"

"Haven't Ah said 'at she's de Lo'd's anointed? Ah's not 'xac'ly anxious to be smitten, no, sah."

"So she's a smiter, eh? Then if she had some gold plates in her possession, and you happened to know it, you wouldn't admit it?"

"Ah admits nothin'. Posimetively nothin'. Ah'm dumb."

"Even in view of that case down in Georgia? Even in view of this charge of possessing counterfeited money? Even in view of the fact that you know I'm a Federal officer—and might—might I said—be able to get the case against you dropped—you're dumb, eh? Kind of a —— fool, aren't you?"

"What you mean, Misto' Casey, sah, 'bout having the case against muh dropped? You mean Ah could go free?"

"If you're just a plain —— ijjit," Casey answered, "you'll go to jail anyhow. Come on; what d'ye know."

"She's de Lo'd's anointed."

"Did she bring any gold plates back with her from Jerusalem?"

"Ah've not seen um, Misto' Casey, sah."

"You've heard about 'em, maybe?"

Aloysius Jackson swallowed his Adam's apple again, and looked miserable, but didn't answer.

"All right," said Casey. "Ever hear of a man named Gulad?"

"No, sir."

That answer was prompt and obviously truthful. You could see by the look of relief on the colored man's face that he was glad to be able to answer unguardedly at last. But Casey wasn't satisfied.

"She was in Jerusalem; you know that?

How many people returned in her party?"

"Seven, sah. The sacred numbah, sah."

"Good. There were six when she left the States. Who is the seventh?"

"Misto' Moses."

"First or last name?"

"He ain't got but the one."

"Just plain Moses, eh?"

"Jes' Moses, sah."

"What sort of looking man is this plain Moses?" Casey demanded.

"Colored gel'man, sah."

"What else? Tall—short—fat—thin—medium—two legs or wan—ears or fingers missing—scars?"

"Medium, Misto' Casey, sah. Medium jes' about 'scribes him."

"What kind of medium? Goes off into a trance. Spiritualist? That sort o' medium?"

"Medium-size, sah. His spirit ain't medium. He's de leas' mediumest spirit ever was."

"You know him intimately?"

"No, sah. Ah's jes' heard him talk."

"What did he talk about?"

"Doctrine o' Moses, sah, an' spoilin' the 'Gyptians an' promised lan'."

"Where was that?"

"Colored folks promis' lan' in Africa, Misto' Casey, sah."

"I mean, where was it that you heard him talk?"

Aloysius Johnson closed his mouth tight and put both hands into his hip pockets.

"Ah don't 'xac'ly 'member, sah."

"Show him that gold plate," said Casey, turning suddenly to Allison; and Allison unwrapped it carefully.

"Ever see one like it?" Casey demanded.

"No, sah."

He was obviously lying. His eyes nearly popped out of his head, and he fidgeted nervously, shifting from foot to foot.

"You've seen a couple o' dozen or more of 'em recently, now haven't you?"

"No, sah."

"All right," said Casey, "that's as good as 'Yes.'"

He opened the door and whistled; a plain-clothes policeman appeared.

"Take him downstairs and keep an eye on him until you hear from me," he ordered; and Aloysius Jackson went out as he came in, walking like a cripple.

CHAPTER IV

"His name was Gulad."

THE door had no sooner shut on Aloysius Jackson than Casey's air of optimism left him.

"Ye've a bad case," he said. "The plates weren't stolen from ye. They were taken from this old temple whiles y'r backs were turned, and maybe that's ag'in' the law of Agypt, but ye haven't proved that this man Gulad took them, nor what he did with them. If Mrs. Aintree has them how are ye going to prove that she didn't come by them legally? Possession, me boy, is nine points of the law. That colored man who came to Boston under the name o' Gulad will be sent back, for it's illegal to enter the country under a false name. But the real Gulad, who's a citizen, didn't change his name until after he got here, and he has a perfect right to call himself Moses or Murphy if he wants to, as long as his passport is O. K.

"Ye've got to prove first that the gold plates exist at all except in somebody's imagination. Then ye've got to prove that he has no right to them, and that you have the right to charge him with the theft. Then ye'll have to produce an extradition warrant, and on top o' that ye'll have to satisfy a judge that he's the identical man, and that there's evidence enough to justify his extradition. It don't look good to me. There's no law against importing bullion or antiquities. This isn't a case for me at all. I've nothing to do with romance, as I told me friend Ramsden this morning. But though the son-of-a-gun looks like an iliphant Ramsden is really as romantic as a schoolgirl. It's a clear case for him and his new daytective company. Ye'd better hire Ramsden to look into the romantic ind of it, and ye might make use of Aloysius Jackson to begin with."

"How?" demanded Brice and Allison together.

"Me friend Jeff Ramsden must consider that. It's my guess that if that nigger is brought to trial the jury will acquit him. But I can throw a scare into him, and I will. I'll see him prisently, and send him up here for Ramsden to confabulate with. And now I'll have to be leavin' ye, for I've work to do. Me friend Jeff Ramsden knows how to get in touch with me at any time."

Brice and Allison sat looking at each other gloomily. They didn't recover, even when Aloysius Jackson came shambling in again.

But Aloysius Jackson was another who had not recovered. He was suffering from the Appleton, West Virginny, blues—sick at the stomach with dread of Terence Casey and the law, and of me in the bargain. When I shifted my bulk to answer the bedroom phone Aloysius Jackson jumped.

It was Casey at the phone.

"Y'r man's amenable," he advised. "Me and the bull downstairs had a session with him, and he'll eat out o' your hand from now forward. Keep him scared, and threaten him with me if he gets sassy."

Casey rang off, and I surveyed Aloysius Jackson for a minute. In addition to him I had to impress Brice and Allison, for a mistrustful client is bad, and two are worse—especially if one of the two is a normally suspicious Scotsman. I didn't feel nearly as confident as I may have looked.

"Nigger," I said, "do you want to die?"

"No, sah, Misto' Ramsden."

"Do you want to be all smashed up with this?"

I showed him a fist, and neither of mine is ornamental.

"Mr. Ramsden, sah, Ah nevo done you no harm."

"You've got to do me some good."

"Ah's shoh willin'."

"Where does Mrs. Aintree stay?"

" 'Partment seven, Roscoe House, Riverside Drive, sah."

"Where are the P. O. P. meetings held?"

"Fifty-ninth an' Ninth. Big top room, sah."

"How many entrances to the big top room?"

"Two, sah. Front way up f'r or'nary members. Rear way, back stairs f'r 'nitiates."

"When's the next meeting?"

" 'Morrow night, sah, nine o'clock."

"Any gallery in that big room?"

"Yessah. Back stairs go on up."

"You take me there tomorrow night," said I, "and if you don't hold your tongue you know what's coming to you."

"Misto Ramsden, sah, they search that air gallery f'r strangers. You-all is a stranger."

"You're the one who does the searching then," I answered. "No back talk! Your only chance of a whole skin is to do exactly as you're told."

"Yessah, Misto Ramsden."

"Meet me at my office tomorrow evening at six-thirty."

HE SLUNK out of the room looking utterly despondent. It was tough to have to go back on the "white folks" who had bailed him out of the Tombs. I've met colored men who wouldn't have done it, however scared they might be, for being afraid has nothing to do with being yellow. The test is, will you jettison your friends to save yourself, or to save them will you swallow your gruel—screaming or smiling—it doesn't really matter which? There is no other criterion. Aloysius Jackson was yellow.

That night I received *carte blanche* from Meldrum Strange who saw in a moment the international significance of Mrs. Aintree's doings.

"She's playing for power. Some women take to that quicker than hop," he grunted. "Go after her hard. Spare no expense. Follow up without waiting to consult me, but keep me posted."

It was nine o'clock when I left him. I went straight from his hotel to Roscoe House on Riverside Drive to call on Mrs. Aintree; and I had the advantage of her, for she did not know me from Adam's off ox.

It wasn't exactly easy to get to see her, though, for her corps of followers had a system for keeping unwelcome visitors outside the door. They seemed to regard her as a she-pope, whom it would be sacrilege to intrude upon. However, the janitor downstairs regarded her otherwise. He said he intended to ask the agent to put her out, because all the other tenants were complaining.

"She rented the apartment furnished," he said. "Came alone, and asked particularly whether the house was quiet. Didn't want dogs, children, or noisy house-parties. Looked good to me, and I fell. She moved in with five others, and they've been receiving colored people all day long ever since—one after another—sometimes twos and threes. I've refused them the elevator; they've had to walk up, but they keep on coming. One comes half-a-dozen times a day. He's up there now if I'm not mistaken."

I was met at the apartment door by five of the inner-guard, and said that I brought news from Jerusalem for Mrs. Aintree's private ear. They were meek, but meekness is a much more difficult thing to deal with than audacity. They stuck to it that they were qualified to receive any message for Mrs. Aintree. They insisted that she was "not at home" to visitors, and might not be disturbed. However, I stumbled on the combination presently.

"My message is from Moses in Jerusalem," I said. "I'll tell it to nobody but Mrs. Aintree."

"How did you discover her address?" a mild man of sixty asked suspiciously.

"Moses of Jerusalem referred me to Moses of New York," said I, and they let me in.

"Is your name Moses?" they asked me. But I couldn't guess the right answer to that, so said nothing.

The room I was ushered into was just the place for a woman to sub-rent, whose means were nothing remarkable, and who wanted to make the utmost possible display. There was ten thousand dollars' worth of furniture in that one room—Louis the Lover stuff, all gilt and rosy cupids, with mirrors wherever there was room for one. You couldn't turn without seeing yourself reflected; and you could see whoever else was in the room from every possible angle by the simple process of selecting the right mirror.

Mrs. Aintree came in presently, and the meek fraternity retired—two men and two women, all going out through the same door without waiting to be told to; the fifth member of the household was in the kitchen, for I heard a clattering of dishes through the open door.

There was plenty of time to look at Mrs. Aintree, for she waited until the last of her team had left the room, and tried the door after them to make sure it was properly closed. I saw her from every viewpoint.

SHE weighed considerably more than two hundred pounds, but carried the weight well. She would pass for a fine, big woman. A low-necked green and gold evening dress displayed her heavy shoulders, and exaggerated the forward tilt of her neck, producing an effect of great power; it was probably power of will, but there was somehow a suggestion of the washtub and physical strength won by leaning over it.

Her hair was carefully curled and dressed, a shade between brown and gold. She had a fine, bold forehead, that could wrinkle into angry vertical creases when she chose to be overbearing; and her big, full face was almost manly. She might have been a Tomboy in her 'teens, and never have lost the yearning to compete with men.

But her most remarkable features were her eyes and mouth. The eyes were magnificent: large and brilliantly blue, looking frankly at you, not afraid to challenge; possessed of a certain humor, too, that seemed to boast of seeing through you and being on the whole amused. Her lips were perpetually parted, displaying fine white teeth a little too widely spaced. The two upper incisors touched her lower lip, and gave the key to her character—vampire will-power, drawing sustenance from living people. That woman had no use for dead ones.

I suspected her of considerable subtlety when put to it, but she chose to open on me with the crudest kind of hail-fellow-well-met stuff that ever a stock-salesman practised.

"Mr. Ramsden? So glad to meet you. I was a little disturbed by an unknown caller at this hour, but the first glance reassured me. We become psychologists, don't we, as we gain experience. I'd know you instantly for a man of calm and honorable purpose. I'm sure you've something tremendously interesting to talk about."

"I have," said I; and she looked hard at me.

Subtlety may be good, but I have none, and I hate it; don't want any.

"I've come to talk about your P. O. P. society," I said.

"Do you mean that you wish to join the P. O. P.?" she asked.

"I want to know about it. What is its basis?"

"The Mosaic Law."

"Is it a secret society?"

"No," she answered. "How can any universal law be a secret? But the Mosaic Law has always been misinterpreted. It was held to apply in the first place to the Israelites in Egypt, and to them only, but there is nothing universal about that. Every race, every people must eventually have its Moses who will lead them out of

bondage; and everybody is a Moses who knows what Moses knew and acts as he did."

"Everything included?" I asked her.

"How is one to make exceptions?" she asked. "Who shall draw the line, and where?"

"Murder and spoiling the Egyptians are not objectionable?" I asked her.

"Killing isn't always murder," she retorted. "Nor is spoiling the Egyptians theft—if done in the right way. Moses said: Thou shalt not steal. But he spoiled the Egyptians."

"And you are preaching that to ignorant people?" I asked her.

"Everyone is ignorant who doesn't understand the Law of Moses," she retorted. "My field, however, is among the colored races, who need their Moses as badly as ever the Israelites needed theirs."

"Have you thought of the consequences?" I asked. "If they interpret literally your teaching that killing is not murder, spoiling isn't theft, can you imagine what might take place in the United States, for instance?"

"What happened to the Egyptians?" she answered. "Tyranny entrenched has no rights that anybody need respect. If people insist on suppressing the colored races, they must take the consequences, just as the Egyptians did. If the British insist on suppressing the colored races within their borders, they must also take the consequences: The same applies to the French, the Portuguese, the Spaniards, the Brazilians, the Italians—to every people that is holding colored races in subjection."

"And why should you be the Moses for the colored races?" I asked. "You're not colored."

"No," she said. "Neither was Moses an Israelite. Whoever understands the law of Moses becomes a Moses. I accept no responsibility. I teach. I do not make laws, but teach the law that was propounded on Sinai centuries ago."

"Why do you call your sect the P. O. P?" I asked.

"People of Pisgah? It was from Pisgah that Moses saw the Promised Land. My followers rise to Pisgah heights and see what lies before them. They become prophets, in a degree that depends on individual inspiration and zeal."

"Do they perform miracles?" I asked, casting about for questions that might tempt her to keep on talking.

"They become able to accomplish their purposes in ways that unenlightened people can not understand. I will give you an instance: Just as the Israelites were given laws engraved on stone tablets, and the Mormons have writing on gold, we needed a standard by which to test our authority and our actions. Well; you are familiar with the Bible, Mr. Ramsden? You recollect how patient Moses was? How he went into the wilderness for forty years —"

"Yes," I said; "he murdered an Egyptian and ran away into hiding."

"He found what he needed in the wilderness," she answered severely. "An initiate of ours did the same thing. He, too, went into the wilderness—the same Egyptian wilderness. In considerably less than forty years he was led to find exactly what was needed—the law engraved on gold by the very hand of the original Moses himself!"

"I'd like to see that," I suggested.

"Mr. Ramsden, that is presumption. Among the Israelites none was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. You must attain to the level of high-priesthood before it would be even safe to show you what our initiate found. That initiate of ours was led to find the gold plates through great self-abnegation and sincerity, and none can get the right to see what he found, in any other way."

"Was his name Gulad?" I asked her, and she looked startled, but recovered instantly.

"Yes," she said, "his name was Gulad."

"Mameluke Gulad?"

"Yes. But he has taken the name of Moses. That is the prerogative, and in fact the duty of all initiates."

"I'd like to see him," I said. "Is he in New York?"

She paused a long time before answering that. Finally she lied by innuendo.

"No," she said, "you can't see him at present possibly."

"The janitor told me that he is in your apartment now."

"That janitor!" She smiled, but looked hideously angry—then fell back on flattery.

"Mr. Ramsden," she said at last, "I told you that those who understand the Law of Moses attain to more than the usual measure of discernment. It is clear to me that you are no ordinary man. Whether

you are destined to be one of us or not, I do not know, but I feel impelled to grant your request. Honesty is a key that opens doors."

SHE pressed an electric button, and the door was opened by the meek man of sixty, who smiled like a verger viewing a bishop at close quarters. She tossed him her order, and in another minute in came Gulad, the meek individual closing the door behind him silently.

"Moses, this is Mr. Ramsden. He has expressed a strong desire to see you."

Gulad-Moses looked irritated. He was black of countenance, with quite a lot of yellow in the whites of his brown eyes. Patient I dare say; cynical certainly. Dressed in black evening clothes, with a fair-sized diamond in his shirt-front. An upstanding, lithe figure, as are many Abyssinians, but with the unmistakable Abyssinian head that doesn't provoke confidence, whichever angle you view it from.

Moses-Gulad looked at me, failed to make me feel uncomfortable, recognized my suspicion of him and made no effort to seem friendly.

"Why do you wish to see me?" he demanded.

He stood with that sort of sneer on his handsome lips that can be turned into a smile on the instant if necessary—standing deliberately close in order to compel me to look up at him, which is a trick understood by most bullies. It was mighty tempting to send him staggering back on his heels.

"I came to see those gold plates you brought from the Near East," I answered.

"Who told you anything about them?"

If you've never heard an Abyssinian trying to take the upper hand of a white man you don't know insolence. Mrs. Aintree looked positively scared, and something that may have been tact, or may have been just foolishness, impelled me to save the situation for her.

"A gentleman named Brice described them to me," I answered.

Gulad-Moses began to betray nervousness, but covered it pretty well.

"Mr. Brice will have to be arrested if he tries to interfere with me!" he retorted. "Brice heard of my discovery, and has been trying ever since to get possession of the plates on all sorts of pretexts. He and Allison are nuisances—two crooks—who don't yet realize what kind of man they have to deal with! Tell them from me that I've stood all the nonsense I'm going to."

"I'm not a public messenger," said I. "I'm interested in those gold plates."

He laughed cynically, and turned his back. But the mirrors served my purpose as well as his. Instead of his catching the expression of my face off-guard as he intended, he betrayed his own. It was malignant, alert, cunning, and combined with a dislike of me and a suddenly born distrust of Mrs. Aintree—or so I read it. He threw one swift look sidewise at her that should have made her blood run cold if she had seen it. Then, facing suddenly about again, he sneered:

"I suppose you are one of those newspaper people? Tell your newspaper that for a million dollars they may see the box in which the plates are kept, and that is all!"

"Really, Mr. Ramsden, they can't be shown to any except initiates," Mrs. Aintree explained, in an effort to calm the atmosphere.

Gulad-Moses was beginning to pace the floor and work himself into a passion.

"Already too many have seen them!" the black man snarled, pausing in front of her. "Too many fools have seen them! I warned you. I warned you. I warned you! I told you what would happen if you talked! A man is a fool to trust a woman! You admitted to this person that you had seen the plates—you fool!"

She bit her lip. Before she could answer him he turned on me.

"I don't care for your newspapers! Tell your newspaper, and tell Brice and Allison, that I laugh at them. The police shall arrest Brice and Allison if they annoy me. I am an American. I have a lawyer who will protect my interests. Brice and Allison are liars and crooks, and that is all I have to say!"

At that he stalked out of the room and slammed the door.

"You must excuse him," said Mrs. Aintree. "Possession of those plates and the responsibility have wrought on his nerves. He is hardly himself. He is normally the very essence of politeness. But even Moses of the Exodus, you know, used to fly into a rage at times. We who have spiritual vision, Mr. Ramsden, have more to bear than other people, and should be excused if at times our tempers get the better of us.

Is he right in assuming that you represent a newspaper?"

"No," I said. "Brice and Allison interested me, that's all."

"I suppose that is the Mr. Brice who called on me in Jerusalem along with a Mr. Grim. I wondered at the time what their real object was. Gulad tells me they have been persecuting him for years. He says that Brice managed to steal the most important of the plates. Did Mr. Brice confess to you that he has one of the plates in his possession?"

"I'm not Mr. Brice's confessor," I answered. "You haven't told me yet about your plans."

"You mean the agenda of the P. O. P? We have none in the usual meaning of the word. We will bring light to the colored races and let the light do its own work. When you take two and multiply by two, you don't choose the result; it becomes four automatically. When we teach what we know to people who are as yet in darkness, the result is equally logical and takes care of itself. It is our business to sow the seed. The growth is sure to upset human calculations."

"I've heard anarchists make statements similar to that," I said.

"Ah! Anarchists. Well, they have the courage of conviction, but no knowledge. We have both. Moreover, we have authority in writing done thousands of years ago by the man who gave the ten commandments to the Israelites."

"Then you mean to upset the world, if you can?" I asked her.

"Do you deceive yourself that the world is worth leaving as it is?" she retorted.

"My impression is that you and your friends are planning wholesale murder, anarchy, rape, ruin and misery simply for sake of the power it may bring you personally."

"Strange!" she said. "My intuition told me you are capable of understanding—even of being one of us. But we sometimes make mistakes. You've nothing to do with the police? Well, Mr. Ramsden, let me give you some advice. For your own sake let this matter drop! Don't try to interfere with us! You would find yourself up against a knowledge—a power—a force that you are incapable of understanding. You will be ground to powder! And now I have important work to do, and must bid you good evening."

We shook hands, and I laughed and went. But she did not laugh. In the mirrors I could see her scowling at my back.

CHAPTER V

"Oh you Promis' Lan'!"

GREAT men and women have great vision but can keep their two feet on the ground. Frogs who would be oxen let their vision carry them away into realms of sheer absurdity, where all sense of proportion vanishes.

I don't doubt Mrs. Aintree had tremendous vision. I don't doubt she thought she was entirely right. She fondly imagined Gulad was a man of destiny sent to help her by the Powers that Be, whereas he was an obvious character, using her for his own purposes. The worst of it is that the visionaries seem able to do more harm in twenty minutes than the other fellows can accomplish good in twenty years.

I had seen and heard enough to convince me that Mrs. Aintree was contemplating not much less than revolution under the thin veneer of religion.

So I pulled Meldrum Strange out of bed at his hotel and thrashed the problem out with him from the beginning. Finally we sent for Brice and Allison at midnight, and they agreed to place the whole investigation in our hands; but Allison was so anxious over his loss of the plates that he made me the strangest proposal I ever listened to.

"Man," he said, "ye'll be honest as long as it pays deevidends, I haven't a doubt of it. I'm a poor man, but I'll mak' it profitable for ye to be honest. In the course o' cir-r-cumstances, if ye've any skill in following clues, the r-rascals who've stolen those plates away will be offering ye money to corrupt ye—more by a verra great deal than I could pay ye. But I take it ye're a reasonable man. Ye talk like one who has a fair pride. Ye'll keep a fair bar-r-gain. So if ye'll turn down any offer o' cor-r-uption, I'll give ye the half o' my savings, just to encourage ye. Ye shall have an auditor's cer-r-tificate, and the half of all I've got! It isn't much, I'm warning ye, but honest money will feel better in y'r pur-r-se than a lar-r-ger sum gotten by standing in wi' Gulad and his like."

I hardly knew whether to laugh or swear at him, and ended by doing both. He would have been far more satisfied if I had agreed to take his money. The next thing the dour old faithful did was to hire another detective agency to keep an eye on me. Their man came to me perfectly frankly that afternoon, and to save trouble I promised to write out a daily report of my doings and mail it to his firm!

WHEN evening came, and Aloysius Jackson put in his appearance, I took a taxi to the corner of Fifty-ninth and Ninth, where Aloysius pointed out a narrow door in a red brick building less than half a block away. There were stores on either side of the front entrance, but the four upper stories were all shuttered and there was nothing to show what use was made of them, except for the three letters P.O.P. done roughly in white paint on the left-hand side of the dim hallway, where one cobwebby light burned overhead. But the wooden stair-treads showed the marks of countless heavy feet, and the recently varnished handrail was already beginning to show fresh signs of wear.

I made Aloysius go up first, and followed him, as a precaution against surprize, but there was nobody up there yet. The echo of our footsteps died away as we rested at last in front of a door, on which some former employees of a tailoring concern had scrawled their opinion of the boss together with an alleged portrait of the gentleman.

"That air gallery is inside here, Misto' Ramsden, sah. Got no key, sah."

He felt less afraid of me at the moment than of the dusky brethren who might call him to account for admitting me. "You all might bus' that ole door in," he suggested, trembling.

"Open her up," I said, "or——"

A look at my fist convinced him. He pulled out his clasp-knife, inserted the big blade cleverly, forced back the catch, and stood aside to let me pass through on to a narrow gallery that extended the whole length of one end of a room about sixty feet by thirty. The walls were whitewashed, the windows shuttered, and the only light came down from a dusty factory skylight that reflected the glare from an electric advertisement on a neighboring roof. The floor of the room below was arranged to seat about a hundred people on inexpensive folding chairs, and at the end opposite to the gallery was a small platform covered with red carpet, against which, along one side, stood a piano that had decidedly seen better days.

There was a pile of reserve chairs stacked against the gallery railing near one end; so I spread those out a little, cautioned Aloysius Jackson, and shut myself in. The only entertainment during the hour that followed was provided by a rat, whom curiosity devoured, but who stubbornly refused to make friends because I had no food to offer him except tobacco.

Then came the sound of voices, footsteps on the stairs below, a snatch of song and the jingle of keys, followed by Aloysius Jackson opening the door to search the gallery for strangers. The lights in the hall were switched on suddenly, and the fear on Jackson's face was something to marvel at. He shut the door behind him, walked the length of the gallery noisily to call attention to the fact that he was doing his duty, cautioned me with a finger raised to his lips, and let himself out again, slamming the door with a noise like a thunderclap. A minute later I heard him reporting to somebody below that the gallery was empty.

The hall began to fill rapidly with colored men, and one of them went to the piano, beginning to play all the latest ragtime airs with that peculiar careless ease that no white man ever seems able to imitate successfully. Some of them pushed chairs out of the way and began to dance, and when a dozen colored women entered, the place was in an uproar for several minutes. It was about as little like a religious meeting as a bicycle resembles Camembert cheese.

The initiates began to arrive after a while, and sat on the platform in a row with their backs against the wall, all dressed alike in well-tailored black suits, Aloysius Jackson, who seemed to be acting janitor for the day, shuffled about arranging chairs, glancing up in my direction every now and then. Through the interstices of the stacked-up chairs I counted nine initiates, running the gamut of shades between black and ivory. They were a self-satisfied, well-fed, smug-looking lot.

THE ragtime continued almost until the moment when Mrs. Aintree walked up the aisle in evening dress with orchids on her bosom, followed by Gulad-Moses. Then the tune changed, and everybody stood up, bursting into song—

"*If* there's a devil, and it's true, true, true,
Who'd rob the devil of his due, due, due——?"

It stopped when she reached the platform. There she stood facing them with one hand raised, her back to the initiates, and Gulad stood half a pace behind her. The utter silence in which the congregation waited for her to speak was fair evidence of her hold over them. They didn't even shift their feet or glance about. You could hear the long gasp as one or another grew tired of holding his breath.

"Friends," she began after a full minute, and then paused. She knew the full value of keeping them waiting. "I am glad to see so many of you here this evening. Has the gallery been searched?"

From the back of the hall Aloysius Jackson answered that it had been, his voice quavering.

"Who is that?" she demanded. "You, Aloysius? You searched? Very well. I want to emphasize the need of always doing that. We can not be too careful. Anyone might lurk up there and overhear things that must not be made public for the present."

No general commanding ever addressed his staff with more aplomb than she displayed. Her voice rang with emphasis, and her attitude was one of absolute command.

"We will have only one hymn tonight," she went on, "and we will leave that for the end of the meeting. There have been complaints about the noise we make, and the sooner we get our own hall, where we can follow inspiration without restraint, the better. Let there be more whole-heartedness! Let me see you give more generously—fewer dimes and quarters, and many more dollar bills! Show by your generosity in giving to our cause—that your claim to be entitled to self-determination is not nonsense, as your critics say it is. Let the key-note of your loyalty be Give—Give more—Give magnificently!"

I did not dare move to look around, but it struck me that her speech was falling flat. The initiates behind her, who presumably drew salaries to pay for their fine clothes, beamed approval, but I heard no murmur from the congregation signifying eagerness to pour cash into the coffers. She sensed the backwardness, for she changed her tone.

"Why am I your leader? Because in no other way can you enter your promised land and come into your God-given rights. Remember the Children of Israel. Before they were able to spoil the Egyptians they had to obey their leader and give all their gold and silver to the common fund. It was after they had done that, not before, that their leader showed them how to appropriate the wealth of their taskmasters and then led them through the wilderness into a land flowing with milk and honey."

That suited them better. There began to be a little restlessness. Talk about plunder just over the skyline was more agreeable than demands for cash down.

"Perhaps you are bewildered," she went on. "Perhaps your courage fails when you think of the power of the people who oppress you, who grow richer every day from your starved and unappreciated efforts. But the children of Israel labored under the whip to make bricks without straw, and they broke the yoke! How? By concerted effort in obedience to their divinely chosen leader! Remember that we have the precise instructions of that identical leader engraved on gold, and buried away in the sands of Egypt until at the appointed time your new Moses rediscovered them!"

At that reference to himself Gulad did not actually pat himself on the back, or make any specific gesture; nor did he smile broadly, or say anything; but he came out of a mood of meditative discontent into the broad sunshine of complacency like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis, and I could almost feel his self-esteem physically from where I crouched.

"Perhaps you feel discouraged by the thought that all your promised land is occupied by alien peoples," Mrs. Aintree went on. "I answer you: Remember the children of Israel. They were four hundred years in bondage. It was often their fate, as yours has been, to be carried away into captivity. But they returned, laden with the spoils of their captors."

They applauded that part of her speech, clapping and stamping their feet, the noise increasing until one big buck in the middle

of the hall bawled out:

"Oh you promis' lan'! Oh you li'l land o' milk an' honey! We's on our way!"

She held her hand up, and silence fell as if she had touched the button that controlled them.

"It may seem an insuperable obstacle to you," she continued, "that that vast continent of Africa—your native land—your birthright—is all staked out by European powers, whose trespass is upheld by armed men and artillery. But remember again the children of Israel! They marched into a land that also was occupied by trespassing nations whose military power was considered overwhelming in that day. And what happened? The Lord fought for the children of Israel, and the trespassers were put to the sword and driven out in confusion. The Lord will fight for you, if you obey your leader and respect this new Moses."

THE new Moses preened himself again, but she did not step aside to let him make a speech, and I began to get the hang of the situation. There was rivalry between her and Gulad. He had the gold plates. She had the congregation and the gift of speech. They had tried to combine in partnership, but were as jealous of each other as a pair of rival politicians. I think it crossed his mind to step forward and begin to say something, but she forestalled him with a contralto voice that rang down the hall magnificently.

"You are known as the People of Pisgah. Why? Because you have vision. Because you can rise to the heights of inspiration and discern the destiny in store for you—destiny that depends on strict obedience! You are more fortunate than the children of Israel—for many reasons—in many ways."

"Oh you promis' lan! You promis' lan'! You milk an' honey, we is on our way!"

"You have their example. You have the record of mistakes they made. You can judge how they failed and suffered when they disobeyed. But when they were utterly obedient how they surged on to one success after another, becoming possessed, because they were obedient, of all the wealth of their enemies! On those terms, will you obey or not?"

That got them. The hall broke into tumult. They were willing to promise anything on terms of *quid pro quo*, and their enthusiasm broke bounds until she once more raised her hand. This time she had more difficulty in getting them to be quiet, and it was two or three minutes before she could make her voice heard. Then she struck the vein of promises again.

"You are more fortunate than the children of Israel! They had a land of milk and honey to go to, but it was a little land with limitations, surrounded on every side by enemies. You have a whole vast continent surrounded by the sea! The sea that surrounds Africa will protect you! They had a waterless desert to traverse, and it took them forty years. For you there is only a friendly sea that can be crossed in fourteen days, or less! They had to enter a land that was full from end to end of enemies. For you there waits a continent, where millions of your own race will receive you with open arms—with tumults of rejoicing! They will make common cause with you to drive the tyrants from your coasts."

That set pandemonium loose. Some of them began singing. I caught fragments of three different hymns from opposite ends of the room, and one bull throat drowned out all the others, roaring—

"Oh, you've got to be a lover of the Lord, of the Lord,
If you want to go to heaven when you die——"

The man at the piano struck a chord, and in a moment they were on their feet; but she stilled them with a gesture of magnificent command. A weaker woman, a less clever one in her own way, would have let them shout themselves hoarse and sing themselves into hysteria. But she chose to show authority and check them in the same sort of way that a skilful driver controls his horses after giving them their heads for half-a-minute. There was lightning in her eyes and regal power in her gesture. They grew still.

"You are more fortunate than the children of Israel! They walked. They had to content themselves with such trifles as were considered wealth in those days. They drew on the resources of Egypt in a hurry, taking what could be obtained to balance their account with the Egyptians, who were poverty-stricken compared with your oppressors. You are in no hurry! You

have the wealth of a continent to draw on, such as neither Babylon or Rome could show in their palmiest days. Is obedience a too great price to pay for that advantage?"

Then came the gist of her address—the rhubarb in the sugar-coated pill—the point that made Gulad blink and swallow, taking all the gilt off the ginger-snap of being the new Moses.

"Obey me," she thundered, "and your continent—your promised land—is yours!"

Obey her, not Gulad.

WELL, they promised her. They rose like one man to their feet and filled that hall with a din surpassing the dust-laden tumult of political conventions. It was no wonder that complaints had been received about the noise. The pianist cut loose like one man playing a duet, but made no impression on the din; I could see his hands moving and his figure swaying, but heard no note of the music; and the dry dust rising off the floor and swaying in clouds about the hanging electric lights made me cough until the tears came. But I was perfectly safe up there; they were much too excited to hear me.

It must have been fifteen minutes before order was restored. There were individuals who had to be forcibly suppressed. One man upset half-a-dozen chairs and danced until their occupants fell on him and forced him to the floor, where he lay under the lot screaming with idiotic laughter. And through it all Mrs. Aintree stood smiling patronizingly, every now and then turning to say a word to Gulad, who sulked and said nothing. When more or less silence fell at last I thought she was going to bring Gulad forward and let him say something; but not a bit of it.

"It does my heart good," she said, "to see you so enthusiastic in a righteous cause—so enjoying your clear vision of success. But don't forget that from your Pisgah height you see the promised land without the miles that lie between. There are difficulties to be overcome that lie in wait for you, difficulties not surmountable except by patience and persistence. We need courage, pertinacity, and secrecy combined. Courage that will throw off tyranny. Pertinacity that shall not flinch or falter when your tyrants bring about delay in order to keep you a while longer in thrall to them. Secrecy that shall confound the enemy by keeping him in the dark as to our plans. Dare all things! Persevere in the face of delay! Say nothing! Tell nobody! These are my injunctions to you."

She paused to let another outburst of enthusiasm have a full two minutes' lease before continuing with the self-satisfaction of the demagogue who feels the crowd helpless under hand.

"And why this secrecy? Are we afraid? Not we! But if you warn the Egyptians in advance your chance will be gone. We have work to do before we make our exodus. Our missionaries must go out to Africa and prepare our friends yonder for what is coming. We must raise funds. We must teach. Our propaganda must extend to the towns and hamlets, not only of New York and West Virginia, but of all the United States, and Canada and South America as well!

"Most of you are destined to be missionaries. As porters, as hotel servants, as laborers—in all the menial capacities to which your tyrants have reduced you—you will go forth and sow the seed, working whenever opportunity presents itself. And since every laborer is worthy of his hire, your expenses will be paid from the contributions to our cause that you yourselves take up. The half of every dollar that you take, you keep; the other half you forward to headquarters, where it will be used to swell the general fund. There will be no auditing; no check on you. We People of Pisgah must learn to trust one another before we can expect to have an empire at our feet."

That sentiment struck home! Neither South Sea Bubble nor Blue Sky Mining stock ever looked better to investors than that proposal to share and share alike in all the voluntary contributions without audit. The few faces that I could see took on an expression of hopeful avarice that would have passed muster in the zoo at mealtime, and the initiates on the row of chairs at the rear of the platform beamed almost drunkenly.

"And now," she said, "we have made almost noise enough in this neighborhood for one night. It is our usual course to conclude these meetings with prayer suitable to the occasion; but there is a stipulation in the lease that we must be out of this

hall by ten o'clock, and I shall have to trust you to say your prayers at home on this occasion. We will conclude our meeting with your favorite hymn that I wrote specially for you, and that I think most of you know by heart. During the course of the hymn our initiates will pass among you and take up a collection, and at the conclusion I will ask you to pass out of the hall quietly and disperse, calling as little attention to yourselves as possible."

The man at the piano struck up. They rose to their feet excitedly, and burst into the song I had heard earlier in the evening:

"If there's a devil, and it's true, true, true,
Who'd rob the devil of his due, due, due?
In the dark the devil's lurking,
For our downfall ever working,
But we'll laugh to see his finish in his own bad brew!

Let the devil wear the shackles that he forged—so—well!
Ours shall be the kernel, his the emp-ty shell!
For the Lord the earth is ridding
Of the fools who did his bidding,
And they'll tumble with the devil into hell—hell—hell!"

I DIDN'T stay to hear any more, but took my chance of opening the gallery door unseen and slipping out. Nevertheless I was seen from the platform, or at any rate the door was seen to move. Four big black men came out of the door below and intercepted me, demanding insolently what I wanted.

"Is this where the K. of P. meetings are held?" I asked.

"Cain't yo' read?" demanded one of them. "Don't it say P.O.P. down thah on that wall?"

"What was you doin'?" asked another one, crowding me close. He may have got his muscle heaving coal, and he seemed rather to relish the prospect of a scuffle with a white man. It's fortunate that colored men have good thick skulls, or there would have been a case for the coroner. One made the gross mistake of getting between me and the stairs to bar my way, and as his jaw was thrust out quarrelsomely I hit that first. He went over backwards and crashed downstairs on his head and shoulders before the other three could razor in, and I took the stairway at a running jump, landing on my victim as I passed, taking out of him any wind that might have remained, and surely delaying pursuit because he lay across the stairs and they had to feel their way over him in semi-darkness.

Once outside there was no further danger. Men whom Meldrum Strange had sent came on the run the minute I showed myself. They were most of them colored men, who had worked for banks and suchlike institutions, but two were white.

I ordered the colored men to shadow the initiates. The white men's job was to watch Mrs. Aintree and her accomplice Gulad, not interfering with them but instantly reporting the first sign of any contemplated move.

Then I phoned Meldrum Strange and set off in a hurry to find Terence Casey, for I wanted his advice. But hurry did not help me much. That boast of his that I would know where to get in touch with him at any time was easy to say offhandedly but not demonstrable. I chased him from pillar to post, by phone, messenger, taxicab and on foot, being sent on from one place to another by secret-service men, every one of whom had seen him that evening because he had been the rounds and given them instructions for what they said was an important case.

And I found him at last near midnight, in a little back room over a place that had once been a saloon, pulling off his socks preparatory to getting into bed with his shirt and trousers on. There was a telephone beside the bed, and I guess he used that place habitually.

"Well?" he said smiling, as an old woman ushered me into the room. "How's the new case coming? Have ye cut y'r eye-teeth yet?"

"I told you it was a case for the police," I answered, "and it is."

"Sit ye down on the bed, Ramsden me boy, and unburden the sorrows av y'r soul. Tell me all about it."

I repeated to him word for word all that I could remember of Mrs. Aintree's speech, and added my own comments.

"——" said Casey, when I had finished. "Go home and sleep, unless ye want to share this bed with me. That's *nothing!* Ye should have heard the devils talk in Butte around the mining camps. She's just a hot-air expert out for exercise and small change. You go home to bed, me boy, and dream about y'r fee ye'll get from Brice and Allison!"

CHAPTER VI

"No form of abstinence. No fasts. No saints' days."

MELDRUM STRANGE tried to interest the Attorney General's department, but without success. Terence Casey's secret report on the subject was a deciding factor. He denied to me having sent in any such report, but with a smile in his eye.

"Ye're like all amatchoor daytectives, Ramsden, me boy. Ye think that y'r case is a lallapolooser, and all the departments are banded together wi' red tape to keep ye from savin' the body politic. Ye've been reading Sherlock Holmes—good reading too; I don't blame ye. But I'm busy. Go an' 'tend to y'r case an' don't worry me. When ye're weary of such foolishness, go back to huntin' iliphints—a game ye understand."

But we didn't have to be guided by political considerations or by the barometric state of someone's bile in Washington, D. C. We put our whole force on the problem, regardless of expense. Jeremy wrote from London that two white missionaries and a number of colored ones were actively preaching similar doctrines to Mrs. Aintree's in the London slums and other places where the floating colored population could be found. And Grim wrote from Egypt to much the same effect, adding that the story of the gold plates had spread southward into the Sudan and was causing the Administration no small concern. Moses being regarded as a mighty prophet by Christian and Mohammedan alike, the colored missionaries were finding no difficulty in spreading their new doctrine, which found readier acceptance because it included the expulsion of all the white races from Africa forever. Grim wrote:

The thing looks bad, and is growing worse. The natives are getting cockier than ever and less inclined to reason. The story of those gold plates has gone to their heads. They're beginning to talk already about reversing the position and subjecting the white races to their dark authority.

The mystery is where all the money comes from to finance these missionaries. None of them do any work. I've traced a small part of their funds to random subscriptions taken up locally, but there seems to be a central fund that baffles discovery. The money being spent out here greatly exceeds the receipts from donations, so it's obvious someone is paying the piper. These missionaries out here live like fighting cocks, and are growing arrogant.

One thing that makes their propaganda easy is that they preach no form of abstinence. No fasts. No saints' days. No Ramadan with its forty days of thirst and hunger. The conventional moralities are all scoffed at. A man according to their doctrine may have as many wives as he can support, or can be induced to support him. They object to too much prayer, and teach that a man's instincts are his own best guide. You can imagine how such a doctrine as that will draw adherents from all quarters.

There's some one in authority. When a missionary gets orders to go elsewhere, he goes, and another takes his place. They teach absolutely strict obedience, and keep the source of the orders a mystery; but there's a man who calls himself Moses who gets cables in code from New York. I've managed to get copies of some of the cables, but can't puzzle out the code because I can't discover what book the numbers refer to.

This is all too ably thought out and organized to be the work of Mrs. Aintree. That woman is only half-clever. I believe you will find that there's some much abler man or woman behind her, who uses her for a stalking horse to hide his or her own identity. Whoever it is certainly displays a knowledge of the native races far beyond the ordinary as well as an understanding of crowd-psychology in general.

If you examine Mrs. Aintree's antecedents you may discover from whom she got her ideas. They're distinctly second-hand. And my advice is the same old stuff I was always rubbing into you when we hunted together in Arab country. Get close. Be patient. Stay on the job until you force a showdown. Appear to give the enemy a free hand and "Stop, Look, Listen!" Watch out you don't get murdered. Mrs. Aintree, I think, would draw the line at murder personally, but not impersonally. I know her sort; they preach, and some fanatic does the killing, as happened in the case of Lincoln and McKinley and lots of others I could mention.

Above all, don't be discouraged by official cold water and what may look like official impediments placed in your way. Don't talk, or consult authorities. Root right in until you've found the individual who's really running things, and then go for him bald-headed. Yours for peace without perquisites.—GRIM.

As a matter of fact we had already followed in most respects the line Grim recommended. For instance, we had looked up Mrs. Aintree's past, and nothing could afford better proof of Grim's almost uncanny judgment than the result of our inquiries. She had been connected with a School of Esoteric Thought conducted in Boston, Massachusetts, by an East Indian named Pananda, whose teachings had had considerable vogue until Mrs. Aintree, who seems to have been his favorite pupil, led a revolt against him and tried to set up a school of her own in opposition.

I MADE a trip to Boston and called on this man Pananda. He was living in style in a house in the Fenway, had a Chinese butler, and kept me waiting in an extravagantly furnished

anteroom for three quarters of an hour as if he were an up-to-date physician with a fashionable practise. I might have been more impressed by his importance if there had been anybody else on the waiting list, or if I hadn't been curious enough to look about me. There was a peculiar arrangement of mirrors in the room that brought to mind the somewhat similar arrangement in Mrs. Aintree's apartment, so I sat still and examined them, going about it as carefully as if I knew I were being watched.

Mirrors are mighty puzzling things, unless you are accustomed to manipulating them. If you don't believe that, just arrange a piece of paper so that you can see it in a mirror, and without looking at the paper, but observing its reflection in the glass, try to draw a square and then to cross the square with diagonal lines. It was quite a long time before I had figured out that those mirrors were so arranged that a person looking into one of them from one angle would get a full view of anyone who happened to be in the room.

It wasn't so difficult after that to discover that the point from which the view was to be had was in the middle of the wall above where I was sitting, so that I had my back to the view-point and face toward the light. I chose another chair and examined that wall. There were two mirrors, draped with magnificent eastern hangings, and between them a thing shaped like a Persian shield, only instead of being solid it was pierced to form an intricate pattern. Anyone could see easily through its interstices, provided there were a corresponding hole in the wall behind it, but he would have to be standing on a support of some kind, because the lower edge of the shield was more than six feet from the floor. I returned to the first chair and set my foot on it, with the idea of examining the shield more closely, and it was exactly at that instant that the Chinese butler opened the door to announce that Swami Pananda would see me. He saw my foot on the chair, but made no comment.

I was ushered into a large, square room, hung like the first with Eastern draperies but containing very little other furniture. A magnificent carpet covered the entire floor, and at one end of the room were a short couch and an armchair made of teak. Against the wall on my left, at a point that corresponded with the Persian shield in the anteroom was a gilded image of the Bhudda, an enormous thing more than eight feet high, and the large plate-glass windows opposite suffused it with light, making it the one outstanding object in the room. The whole effect was sumptuous, yet magnificently simple and produced a far from disagreeable impression.

Pananda was seated on the couch, and rose to meet me. He was a rather fat man but not flabby, dressed in semi-Indian clothes of yellow silk—a sort of comfortable compromise between the easiness of India and Western notions about decorum. He wore yellow silk socks and yellow, soft, morocco-leather slippers, but no jewelry whatever. For the rest, he was a mild-looking person with remarkable brown eyes, a rather bulging, broad forehead half-concealed under a yellow silk turban, and a smile that was winning, to say the least of it.

"Welcome, Mr. Ramsden. Pray take that easy chair. So; you came to talk to me, but I shall do most of the talking, if you permit. You saw through my little device for analyzing visitors; my Chinese butler interrupted your investigation; it's part of his business to keep an eye on strangers. You'd be interested, I daresay, to see how the arrangement works; the head of the Buddha swings outward on a hinge—look!"

He got off the couch and showed me, pressing a very simple spring catch behind the Buddha's ear. The whole head swung forward like the leaf of a door, disclosing the rear of the Persian shield through a small hole in the wall.

"You see? By standing on the Buddha's lap I can observe anyone in the next room from every angle. I often have a lot of quiet amusement watching visitors unknown to themselves. The longer I keep them waiting, the more completely they give themselves away as a general rule. Then they come in here and tell me silly little lies about themselves and other people. I introduce themselves to themselves for the first time usually. They go away astonished. Sometimes I charge them a big fee, sometimes not, depending on the circumstances. I shall not charge you anything, for instance."

"I had no intention of paying you a fee," I answered.

"I know you hadn't. You came here to investigate me. My brother, you're a very easy man to read; rather honest, but not nearly as honest as you think you are;

a hunter—you have done a lot of killing in your time; a resolute man, and a very faithful friend—those are your two strong points; not quarrelsome, but combative—too willing to settle any argument by strength and brute force. You are one of the strongest men physically, and even in some ways mentally, whom I have met in recent years. As for your present purpose—you came to talk to me about Mrs. Aintree. Am I right?"

"How did you know that?" I demanded.

"Oh, that's very simple. I notice you're not a policeman; you have none of the earmarks of the hired investigator, and I confess that puzzled me for a while. But I put two and two together, you know; that's my business, and I'm an old hand at it. Look at this."

I READ the words "Isobel Aintree" in a bold, thick handwriting at the foot of a letter that he pulled out of his pocket.

"Isobel Aintree is disturbed," he explained. "She's beginning to be sorry that she left my fold—I give lessons, you know. She called me on long-distance, and I went to see her in that apartment she has leased in New York. She wanted advice. Ha-ha! They all come back to their teacher in the end! She told me something of her great plans, and begged me to tell her how to manage an individual named Gulad, who seems to be giving her a lot of trouble. I interviewed this Gulad, and he was very angry with her for having summoned me. He accused her of talking too much, and gave me to understand that she had been especially indiscreet toward a man whose name he didn't mention, but who he said came to see her one evening. That man was obviously yourself!"

He eyed me humorously as if he expected me to see the connection and enjoy the joke. But I didn't.

"I recognized you at once," he said. "She learned that arrangement of mirrors in a room from me. When you sat down in my anteroom I noticed that you recognized the same arrangement. I had quite a little fun observing how long you took to puzzle out the sequence of reflections from mirror to mirror. Gulad had described to me an individual fairly well answering your description. I have in my pocket a letter from Mrs. Aintree, in which she complains that some agency in no way connected with the police is—to use her eloquent description—camping on her trail. She states that all her former friends have been cross-questioned, and her whole past has been inquired into, and begs me to answer no questions in case that anyone should apply to me. When my butler brought your card I added all that together and the total amounted to Mr. Jeff Ramsden here to ask questions about Mrs. Aintree. Not very clever, was I, after all?"

"Do you intend to answer my questions?" I asked him.

"Certainly. Why not? And now you are wondering just how much credence you can place in my answers. Hah! My friend, if you had studied people as scientifically as I have, you would never wonder at my being able to read your thought in that way. Your emotions flit over your face one after another like the pictures on a screen, Mr. Ramsden. Well, as your expression suggested a moment ago, I am something of a mountebank, it is true, but a rather more than usually honest one. I used to be an altruist, as I thought, pure and simple, but have awakened since to consciousness of a vein of absurdity underlying all my efforts to improve the human race.

"My diligent and more promising pupils mostly deserted me in a half-taught condition, as Mrs. Aintree did, for instance, and set up in opposition, sometimes even going so far as to denounce me as an impostor. The stupid pupils simply wouldn't learn, and what they did learn often disagreed with them. So I have been gradually discontinuing to teach, and devote myself nowadays more to giving advice to folk in difficulties, sometimes for a fee, and sometimes gratuitously. I make the rich ones pay, believe me! To that extent I am a mountebank. I frequently charge for performing tricks as simple as the one I played on you just now. On the other hand, I believe I do no harm in the world, and I know I have frequently done good."

"No harm in the world?" I retorted. "You admit that you taught that Aintree woman, and then turned her loose to——"

"Pardon me, my friend, I did not turn her loose. She left me in peculiarly irritating circumstances, and not only set up an opposition class of her own but told lies about me. She accused me of immoralities and I don't know what else. However, I bear no malice. Malice, my friend, poisons

whoever entertains it rather than the one against whom it is supposedly directed, and one of the first lessons I teach is the absurdity of harboring malice.

"When she sent for me the other day I went at once. And I gave her some very good advice. It was so good, and so disagreeable, that she did not offer to pay my expenses to New York and back—not that I would have accepted the money; but she did not know that I would not accept. One of my first principles is never to accept money from anyone whom I have not helped or am unable to help. There is no helping her in her present mood; she is headed toward disaster."

"You might save a lot of trouble for other people," I suggested, "by helping to speed her disaster before she involves too many in it."

"I would hardly do that," he answered. "Good does not come out of evil, although the opposite argument looks plausible at times. The confidences of my pupils, or of people in distress who come to me for advice, are absolutely sacred. It must be obvious that I could not conduct my activities on any other basis. I would go to prison before I would violate a confidence. But a pupil who is disloyal, and who uses my teachings corruptly, as Mrs. Aintree, for instance, does, forfeits in a degree the right to be treated in that manner; in a degree, please understand me, only in a degree."

"You said you would answer my questions about her."

"I did. But my answers will depend upon the questions. I did not tell you in what way I will answer them. Suppose you try me with a sample question to begin with."

"Very well," I said. "Who is coaching Mrs. Aintree? It isn't Gulad, for he's a rather ordinary smart-Aleck; and the scope is much too vast for any woman of her caliber. Who is directing her from behind the scenes?"

"Shrewd!" he remarked. "Much too shrewd for you, in fact, my friend! Obviously she is not the only one who receives coaching! Someone else suggested that question to you. Am I right?"

"Yes. But who is coaching Mrs. Aintree?"

"IT IS no breach of confidence to answer that," he said meditatively. "Bhopal Gosh—a Hindu—more or less a countryman of mine."

"A teacher like you?"

"Not at all like me; but a teacher nevertheless. He has also been known as 'The True Mahatma,' 'The Golden Guru,' 'The Buddha Redivivus'—and by some of his American reporter critics as 'The Perfect Piece of Cheese.' He has other self-conferred titles, too many to remember. I believe that in his heart, to himself in private, he candidly admits that he is the wisest man on earth. He once had the effrontery to make to me proposals that were laughable. I am not ambitious, unless to bring a little comfort into a distressed world, and I gave him what I believe was very good advice—in this room; he was sitting in that armchair. My advice enraged him. He is an immensely powerful man physically. I should say he is even more muscular than you are. He has a temper like a typhoon. I had my work cut out to escape from the interview uninjured, and before he left he swore to make me sorry I had ever met him.

"Well, Mr. Ramsden, I am not given to regretting experiences. They are the chief part of our education. But I knew that that man would destroy me if he could. It was for me to prove that he could not destroy me. He commenced a campaign against me by propaganda, which was less difficult to deal with than if it had been more subtle. At that time he, too, was conducting classes in Boston, charging prodigious fees and appealing in the main to women, which made it rather easy for him to approach my women-pupils indirectly and win some of them away from me.

"Mrs. Aintree was the first to go, and she took several others, five of whom are still with her. She has subjected those five to her arrogant will, by making believe to possess inspired knowledge that is really far beyond her present power of attainment. She is a great play-actor. I made the mistake of teaching her too much psychology before her character was ready to digest such dangerous knowledge; and Bhopal Gosh, who is a man without any conscience but with a rare ability, proceeded to cram her foolish head with much more of the same sort; so that she has become a creature who is clever and foolish by fits and starts.

"She mistrusts Bhopal Gosh, because no one can have intimate dealings with him without discovering his crude dishonesty of purpose; but she respects his knowledge and his adroitness, to use the least objectionable word that seems applicable. And she is

certainly afraid of him. He has taken good care that she shall be afraid of him. That is his invariable method. He has excited her ambition and fed it; and now he makes her believe that with one stroke of the wand, so to speak, he can throw her in the discard and deprive her of all chance to attain the influence over people that she yearns for."

"Why should she come to you for advice, if she thinks so highly of Bhopal Gosh?" I asked.

"Because he has left her in New York with rather more responsibility than she can manage. Mere ambition, Mr. Ramsden, doesn't confer ability. She has what Freud might call the emperor-complex. She seeks to dominate, and knows enough to take the first steps toward her goal. But the first steps are the easiest and the most deceptive; they lead to a stage of bewilderment, which she has reached. And in that peculiar stage of mind she sent for me to give her good advice, having so far lost her sense of right and wrong under Bhopal Gosh's tuition that she actually believed I would help her to consummate his evil purposes in his absence. She said that as my former pupil she was entitled to advice from me. Well, so she is. I gave her some; but she is very far from taking it."

"Where has Bhopal Gosh gone?" I asked him.

"That might be difficult to discover. He is one of those crafty individuals who expects his victims to tell him all their secrets as a point of good faith between pupil and teacher, but who keeps his own counsel perfectly. He makes his preparations a long while ahead. The mere fact that he has started on a journey, let us say westward, is no proof that the East is not his real objective. He has made a tremendous amount of money, because some of his pupils have been successful in business, and it has been easy for him to get inside knowledge of stock exchange transactions. One of his pupils, who afterwards went to prison, was in the confidence of one of the largest brokers in Boston. So he is able to pay for what he can not obtain in other ways."

"Do you suppose he has gone abroad?"

"Possibly. He started for West Virginia, where this P. O. P. society of Mrs. Aintree's had its beginnings. If he has gone abroad from there he probably applied for his passport and booked his steamer passage months ago."

I stared at Pananda for more than a minute.

"And now you are wondering," he said, "whether it is jealousy of Bhopal Gosh that makes me talk of him in this way, and just how far my information may be trusted. I hardly blame you. Every human being is dishonest—with himself, if not with other people; when we overcome dishonesty we shall cease to be humans and become something better. But I am doing my best for you, and that is very likely better than you could get elsewhere on the particular subject of which we are talking. I am not jealous of Bhopal Gosh. It would annoy him intensely to know that I pity him, yet that is the fact. However, I pity a great deal more the unfortunates who have been inveigled under his control. You may believe implicitly every word I have told you about him."

"I daresay you could tell me a great deal more?" I suggested.

"Possibly. I could tell you a great deal more about some of his victims, if that were permissible. But you see my position. I am already half a charlatan, because I descend to such tricks as that hole in the wall behind the Buddha's head. I would be wholly a charlatan if I betrayed confidences made to me in good faith. The truth of the whole matter is that I am a lazy man, extremely willing and in many cases able to give comfort to others, but fond of my own comforts also. You would like me to enter the lists with you against Bhopal Gosh and Mrs. Aintree. That thought has been hovering across your mind for several minutes. I shall disappoint you, I'm afraid."

"I've got work out of lazier men than you," I answered.

"I don't doubt it. But you see, they weren't clever men. You can't get work out of a clever man who doesn't wish to work. I am rather clever, and besides, I have no wish to avenge myself on Bhopal Gosh. Revenge is too costly altogether, and not worth while."

"Aren't you interested in protecting Bhopal Gosh's victims?" I demanded. "He and this Aintree woman are planning to throw the world into the devil of a mess."

"My interest lies only in helping those who actually come to me for help," he answered. "You came to me. I have tried to help you. But my gifts are limited. I can

give you advice, but not material assistance."

"Have you heard anything about some stolen gold plates?" I demanded.

"Oh yes. Mrs. Aintree told me all about them. If you wish me to talk of them you must tell me everything that you know about them first. Then I shall be able to determine how much I can say to you without infraction of others' confidences."

So I told him, beginning with Brice's story and ending with an account of the meeting at "Fifty-ninth and Ninth," New York.

"Very interesting," Pananda exclaimed at last. "Most deeply interesting. There is very little that I can add to your information, but I can give you some good advice. Those plates are, comparatively speaking, harmless in the hands of the Abyssinian Gulad or of Mrs. Aintree, because they both lack the necessary brains to use them to the full advantage. But in the hands of Bhopal Gosh—they would be worse than poison-gas and dynamite combined! If you can prevent his getting them, you will be rendering the world a service. Bhopal Gosh is possessed of devilish ingenuity. He knows perfectly well how to excite men's passions by an appeal to their religious instincts or their superstition. Those plates would better be destroyed than in the hands of Bhopal Gosh."

"What is he? Crazy for power?"

"He has power! He is mischievous. Go after Bhopal Gosh but take care for yourself; for he is more dangerous than all the other dangerous men you have ever met, all put together!"

CHAPTER VII

"Murdered at seven fifteen."

I LEFT Pananda's house with mixed feelings, but on the whole felt inclined to trust his information. The difficulty to my mind was to believe that here in the United States one man—and he a foreigner—could have the gall to plan the world-wide outrage that was apparently intended.

Nevertheless, by the time I reached New York next morning I was inclined to believe, in spite of what I have seen in various quarters of the world in the way of lightning-like adoption of a new idea by widely scattered colored races, that the whole thing was a mare's nest; that the gold plate incident was a simple case of theft; that the P. O. P. was a harmless organization that might keep out of mischief otherwise possibly turbulent individuals; and that Mrs. Aintree was a simply ambitious crank, who would melt presently in the heat of her own hot air.

But Meldrum Strange, who was waiting for me in the office, stolidly chewing one of his dark cigars, threw another light on things. He showed me the collected and typed-out reports of our men in the field. They were from all over the United States, and described secret meetings of the P. O. P., followed by local strikes, violence, and trouble on a small scale generally. There had been a particularly bad local outbreak at Appleton, West Virginia.

"And this is the latest," he said, passing me a longhand report from one of our New York men. "It was too late to get into the morning papers."

He looked delighted. He was in his element, sitting there in the middle of the net like a strong, good-natured spider, feeling the threads of events vibrate to his touch. Along with his deliberate altruism there is a schoolboy passion for intrigue. It was rapidly coming to the point where a murder to him produced the same sort of effect that news of a necessary operation does on a young surgeon. He was almost audibly chuckling. And murder it was, according to our man's account.

> Mameluke Gulad was murdered at 7.15 this morning in his room at Riley's Hotel on Ninth Avenue by an unknown colored man, who entered through the fire-escape. Nothing in the bedroom was disturbed, but Gulad's jaw was nearly wrenched off by the assailant, who gagged him and then stabbed with a broad-bladed knife. No knife was found, but the wound under the ribs on the left side is several inches long. Death must have been nearly instantaneous. The police have charge of the body.

"Our man phoned in at 8.30," said Strange. "I happened to be down here early, and the first thing I did was to phone to Mrs. Aintree and tell her all about it. She'll be round here before long, unless I'm much mistaken."

I began to tell him about Pananda and Bhopal Gosh, but his surmise was accurate enough. Mrs. Aintree sent her card in before I was half-through, and the two of us received her in Strange's private office.

SHE was dressed up to kill, in a lavender creation, with a hat that would have looked too youthful on a maiden of seventeen, and breezed into the office with that sort of unsolicited familiarity that annoys you by its insincerity. She marched on Strange with her hand held out:

"Are you Mr. Ross? Mr. Ramsden I know already, and I met Mr. Grim in Palestine."

"My name is Strange," he answered, bowing slightly.

"Strange? Are you the gentleman who telephoned to say that Gulad has been killed? Pardon me, but how like the pictures of General Grant you look!"

"Be seated, madam, and tell me what you want," he answered.

"Are you connected with the police in any way?" she asked, trying to ignore his bruskness.

"No, ma'am."

"What is this firm? There is no description on the door or in the telephone book."

"We do an international business."

"How did you learn about Gulad's death?" she asked.

"One of our men was passing the place, and saw the assassin escape."

"Well?" she said. "You know something about Gulad or you wouldn't have telephoned to me at once."

"Gulad stole thirty-one ancient gold plates from an Egyptian temple, and brought them to this country with your connivance," Strange answered. "Where are the gold plates, Mrs. Aintree?"

She hesitated, and Strange took a long shot—took it deliberately, as if he were firing at a mark.

"You may stand accused of having that man murdered for the possession of those gold plates," he said. "This firm has been commissioned to recover those plates for their lawful owners. If you know where they are you'd better say so."

"I don't know where they are," she answered. "The pity of it is, I don't know."

She wrung her hands and seemed inclined to cry.

"Gulad would trust nobody with them. He lived in that little back bedroom in Riley's Hotel—a very third-rate place with all kinds of undesirable characters frequenting it constantly, and we begged him to be careful with them and not leave them in his room."

"Who besides yourself was sufficiently interested to caution him?" Strange interrupted.

She hesitated palpably, again. It was my turn to take a long shot.

"Was his name Bhopal Gosh?" I asked.

"How did you know?" she demanded.

"Continue, ma'am," said Strange. "What happened to the plates?"

"I don't know. I wish I did. If I knew where to lay my hands on them I would dispute their ownership with anyone! I've consulted a lawyer. We were quite within our legal rights in keeping them; but now I don't know what to do. You've no notion how much depends on the possession of those plates! Who has commissioned you? Why don't you take the commission from me instead? I'll pay you anything in reason to get them back. If you find them and hand them over to anybody else you'll be robbing me—us."

"What do you think Gulad did with them?" asked Strange. "There was nothing in his bedroom when the corpse was found. The man who escaped was carrying no package. You must have some idea. What might Gulad have done with them? Did he rent a strong-box?"

"I don't know. He had a little money, and opened a bank account at the up-town branch of the Cotton and Woollen National Bank. I went there on my way here, and they wouldn't tell me anything."

I SIGNALED Strange and walked out, leaving the two of them talking. A taxi took me to the Cotton and Woollen National in less than five minutes, and I was admitted at once into the manager's office.

"Does a man named Gulad rent a strong-box here?" I asked. "He has been murdered. You'd better seal the box up."

He took me down into the strong-room, and showed me an entry in the day-book. The box had been opened and its contents removed that morning, exactly three minutes after nine o'clock. A colored man, apparently a negro and giving his name as Simon Borrow, had arrived with a letter signed by Gulad authorizing him to open the strong-box. As a photograph of Simon Borrow together with his signature was attached to the letter the bank had had no alternative. Borrow had gone away five minutes later in the same taxi that brought

him, leaving the strong-box empty. The bank detective had fortunately noted down the taxi's number, and of course the bank had kept the letter and photograph.

I studied the picture of Simon Borrow carefully, and was far from being convinced of his negro origin. He looked more like a native of Bengal. It was the picture of a heavy man in the prime of life, with massive shoulders, an enormously thick neck, and a big, round head, broad forehead, heavy jaw, a rather pug nose, and a smile of supreme self-satisfaction. His eyes were large, heavy-lidded and cunning, and there was a scar underneath the right one. The individual features were strong and not ill-proportioned. Taken together they depicted an immeasurable guile, contempt of other people's intelligence, and ruthlessness.

The strong-room clerk told me that the man's physical strength was prodigious. He had put the contents of the strong-box into a leather valise, and had carried it out with one hand with less apparent effort than most men would seem to exert if the bag were empty, although the weight had made the bottom of the valise sag out of shape.

"I'd hate to be the cop who has to tackle him," said the clerk, as he affixed the bank's seal to the empty strong-box.

The next step was to track down the taxi in which Simon Borrow had driven away, and that presented no difficulties. But before assigning a man to that job I telephoned police headquarters. They promised us "facilities" whatever those are, and my friend Casey looked in in the course of the morning to "learn how to be a daytective" as he expressed it. He grew ribald when I showed him our condensed reports from all over the U. S. A.

"Me boy, d'ye think the State Department hasn't ten times that much dope? I could go to Washington and lay me hands on ev'ry word ye have there, only much better systematized. But suppose ye let me have a copy o' that, just for riference."

HE WAS waiting for the copy to be typed when Brice and Allison came in, each flourishing a different newspaper giving Central News accounts of Gulad's death. Allison looked heartbroken, and Brice hardly any better. Both had made their minds up that the gold plates were lost forever, and Allison was in favor of returning at once to England.

"We're discr-r-edited, disgr-r-aced and ruined men. We found the most impor-r-tant records in the whole world, and let them be stolen from us. For pity's sake let's have the decency to retir-r-e into well merited obleevion."

"Rot!" I answered. "We've a better chance than ever. You have the most important plate."

"Aye, ye've said the word! The key to all the others—as useless as a barren cow without the others—as useless as the lost ones are wi'out our key! Man, man; if I only knew that the thief were a scholar o' par-r-ts, I'd r-rather he'd stolen the key too than know that such invaluable witnesses o' history were rendered dumb by separ-r-ation!"

Where do ideas come from? I suppose if you could tell me that you could answer all the riddles of the universe. I was satisfied that "Simon Borrow" and Bhopal Gosh were one and the same person. And now Allison, bemoaning his disaster, provided an idea that was like a beacon on a dark night.

"We've hardly started our investigation yet," I said. "If I assure you that I've confidence in being able to recover those plates, will you stay and lend a hand?"

"Yes!" said Brice instantly. "Certainly, yes."

"Man, ye're daft!" said Allison with withering scorn. "Ye'd heap a ruinous expense on what is much too bad already! We'll gang hame to obleevion."

"I happen to be the senior member of this commission," Brice retorted quietly. "We'll stay."

Allison yielded without another word. Brice understood him pretty thoroughly, for the two had worked together in desert places, and there is no better way to get a true line on your partner. Having made his protest as a matter of principle, Allison was only too glad to concede the point. I then propounded mine.

"The man who has taken those plates," I said, "will be as quick as anyone to recognize the value of the key to them. He has committed a murder. He'll have to stay in hiding as long as the police hue and cry lasts. He won't dare try to go aboard ship, for that's the surest way of getting caught. He's a cunning devil. The only way to catch him is to let him know that the one key-plate that completes the set and makes

translation of the whole lot possible is in the United States. He'll try to get hold of it. In that way we'll get hold of him."

"Ye mean we'll use the one we have to bait a mouse-trap with?" asked Allison.

"Something like that."

"What's your plan then?" Brice demanded.

"The murder was committed, and those plates were stolen," I said, "by a man named Bhopal Gosh, a Bengali who has all along in secret been the guiding hand behind this P. O. P. He is likely to have half-a-dozen different alibis. He's a thoughtful rascal, who leaves nothing to chance but takes swift advantage of other people's carelessness. We've got to appear to be careless. We've got to parade that plate around the country in such a manner that he'll get to hear of it; and the best way we can do that, I believe, is to do it in connection with the P. O. P."

"Ye'd have a lot of black men juggling with it?" Allison demanded, shocked.

"I'd have a lot of black men discussing it," I answered. "I propose that we join the P. O. P."

"Ye mean ye'd take part in their heathenish abominations? Ye'd have us show our plate and let those black men wor-r-ship it? I'll lend idolatry no countenance on any ter-r-ms at all," snapped Allison. "The P. O. P. is a weekid schism!"

"I'll join anything, if we can get those plates back," Brice said quietly.

"Ye'll join? Then bang goes my last atom o' respect for ye!" exclaimed Allison. "Ye'll join? Oh, verra well. I recognize the adamantine nature o' y'r wilfulness. I'll have to join along wi' ye, but Lord, who'd ha' thought we'd come to this!"

That being settled, I went into the next office to talk the proposal over with Strange. He already had particulars about the taxi; the driver reported having driven a "full-sized colored man," from the Cotton and Woollen National Bank as far as the Washington Square Arch, where his fare got out and mounted an up-town omnibus. That occurring to him as peculiar, he had followed the omnibus back for several blocks out of idle curiosity, and recalled its number. But that got us nowhere. A passenger with a valise can disappear from the top of an omnibus at any point he pleased along Fifth Avenue without exciting comment. Later, when I questioned the conductor he didn't as much as remember having carried him.

CHAPTER VIII

"He likes notes of rather large denominations."

EVENTS began to follow now in swift succession. The first was a conference at police headquarters, by police request, in the course of which Strange and I told the whole story as far as we knew its details. The police had grilled Mrs. Aintree thoroughly, but got small change out of her. Since seeing Strange and me in the office she had executed a complete *volte face*—denied knowing much about Gulad, beyond that he returned with her party from Palestine—denied ever having seen any gold plates, although she admitted knowing that Gulad had imported "something of the sort"—had no knowledge of any one who would be likely to murder Gulad for the sake of the gold plates, but had her suspicions of a certain Mr. Brice, who Gulad had said was capable of anything and who, for all she knew, might be in New York—and was, generally speaking, indignant as well as carefully vague.

She gave the police permission to search her apartment, which they promptly did, but found nothing incriminating.

The police knew nothing about Bhopal Gosh until I mentioned his name; and then knew no more of him than I did. However, within five minutes after that we had settled on a plan of action.

I went straight to Mrs. Aintree's apartment, where, in addition to one of our men in the uniform of a hall-porter, there was a pretty obvious plain-clothes policeman on duty in the vestibule. She sent out word that she was indisposed, but I answered that she could choose between interviewing me or the police, and she decided to see me alone in the room with the mirrors. She was black-angry. The creases in her forehead resembled a devil's finger-marks, and her wonderful blue eyes were alight with what I analyzed as treachery. If ever a man or woman stood ready to throw over a whole cause to save herself, that one was she—or so I read the situation.

"Have you seen the police?" I asked her.

"They have seen me. I was never more insulted in my life," she answered.

"They tell me that you deny ever having seen those gold plates," I answered.

"Can you prove that I have seen them?" she retorted. "Can you prove that they exist?"

"You're going to prove that!" I answered. "When did you last see Bhopal Gosh?"

She turned white on the instant and bit her lip.

"Who told you about Bhopal Gosh?" she answered.

"Mrs. Aintree," I said. "The police don't know—yet—that Bhopal Gosh murdered Gulad to obtain those gold plates. But I know it, and so do you. The police theory is that you were jealous of Gulad and instigated someone else to murder him. You've got one way out."

"What is it?" she demanded.

"Help bring Bhopal Gosh to book!"

She caught her breath.

"I wouldn't dare!" she answered in a hoarse voice. "I wouldn't dare!"

"You've got to dare!" I retorted. "My firm is willing to protect you. We regard you as the mere tool of Bhopal Gosh. But you've got to be frank and tell us all you know about him."

"He is the real organizer of the P. O. P.," she said, speaking almost like a woman in a dream. "He is the power behind the throne. He promised me the throne, but he was always to be the power behind it."

"I know all that," I answered, and she looked startled.

There is nothing under heaven so effective as telling your informant that you know what has just been told you. They jump to the inaccurate conclusion that you knew it before they spoke.

"I d-ddaren't turn on him!" she stammered. "If he murdered Gulad, what is to stop him from murdering me?"

"I have promised you protection."

"You don't know him! He is stronger than two men, and more cunning than ten! More than cunning; he is inspired."

"By the devil?"

"Probably. To hear him talk you would believe him the greatest of philosophers. Mr. Ramsden, let that man alone! Don't drag me into this! I swear to you I had nothing whatever to do with Gulad's murder. I didn't know he had been murdered—hadn't a suspicion, until Mr. Strange telephoned this morning. This business has ruined me. I shall have to abandon my connection with the P. O. P.——"

"Why?"

"B-because of the plates," she stammered. "I am totally discredited."

"You've made arrangements to show those plates at secret meetings of the P. O. P?"

She nodded.

"Hadn't they been shown to anybody yet?"

"Gulad wouldn't show them. He was afraid of losing them. He was difficult to manage. He seemed to think that he was being jockeyed out of his proper place at the head of the movement. He had extraordinary fits of jealousy, and I sent for Bh——"

"Yes," I said. "Go on; you sent for Bhopal Gosh. What for?"

"I had to have advice. Bhopal Gosh was my teacher—the most resourceful man I ever knew. He came—interviewed Gulad—told me that he would manage him for me—and went away again, leaving Gulad more unmanageable than before. So I sent for another man from Boston—Pananda—a man who was my teacher formerly. But all he did was to advise me to abandon the P. O. P. I shall have to abandon it. I can't help myself."

"Pananda gave you good advice," I answered, "but you're going to undo some of the harm you've done before you just step back! You're going to help catch Bhopal Gosh!"

"I can't! I daren't!"

"Very well; come with me to police headquarters. My firm will turn its information over to the police."

"Mr. Ramsden, you don't know what you ask."

"Better than you do! I'm better able to judge the amount of harm you've done already all over the world."

"It was Bhopal Gosh, not I. Every move we made, every detail of our propaganda, has all been thought out and directed by him in advance. He had an intellect that I sometimes think is godlike, and—look at Gulad, for instance—poor Gulad, who, I suppose, refused to do his bidding! I tell you, Mr. Ramsden, that man Bhopal Gosh will get you, and get me too, if he isn't let alone! Leave him to the police! Leave me out of it!"

"You're in it already," I answered.

"Have you no pity or respect for womanhood?"

I laughed at that. I couldn't help it. Pitiable or respectable womanhood is far from the picture she presented.

"I'll protect you from Bhopal Gosh," I answered. "The point is: Will you or won't you help willingly? My time is limited."

I PULLED my watch out, and stood up. She was still hesitating.

"I must consult a lawyer."

"They'll let you see one at police headquarters. There's an officer down-stairs, who'll call a taxi if you——"

"No, no, don't do that! I'm innocent. I can prove it. Very well, Mr. Ramsden, I'll do all I can."

I sat down again and tossed my hat on to the floor.

"Have you severed your connection with the P. O. P.?" I asked.

"Not yet. There wasn't time."

"Several white members beside yourself?"

"Yes. Can't always rely on colored people to keep the real end in view. Besides, whites are quite essential when it comes to hiring halls and things like that."

"Admit three more white members."

"Who are they?"

"Brice, Allison, and myself."

"My nomination is all that would be necessary. But what is your idea?"

"Have you called off future arrangements—canceled dates for meetings—anything like that?"

"There hasn't been time. Gulad and I were scheduled to go on tour with those plates and show them in secret session to all the members everywhere."

"Don't call that off. Brice and Allison have the most important of the gold plates—the only one that wasn't stolen. You can show it and say the others are in safe-keeping. Admit some more colored members, too. I'll give you a list of their names. When are you scheduled to go on tour?"

"Wednesday of next week."

"Give me a list of the places and dates."

She took a list from her writing cabinet, and I put it in my pocket.

"I suppose your word is absolute among your followers?" I asked.

She nodded, a bit shamefacedly. It was the first sign I had seen in her of any really decent feeling.

"Contradict officially, then, any rumors about those plates having been stolen. The story will be kept out of the newspapers if possible. If it should leak out, contradict it."

"Very well."

"And report to me instantly any effort on the part of Bhopal Gosh to get in touch with you. If he writes, don't answer him without consulting me. Will you do that?"

"Yes. But he won't try. He's far too clever."

"We'll see. Answer no questions from outsiders."

"I surely won't. I've enough trouble already."

"One more point. Until further notice, Mrs. Aintree, the power behind the throne as you have described it, of the P. O. P., will be Grim, Ramsden and Ross! You understand me? The control has passed."

She looked daggers, but said nothing. She was not in the least convinced that she had done wrong, but regarded herself as a martyr, whose failure was due to meddlers and to circumstances over which she had no control. But she hadn't the martyr's courage, for she surrendered utterly.

I had a talk down-stairs with the man we had posted on watch, and went from there to the office on Lexington Avenue where the clerical business of the P. O. P. was done. The police had been there ahead of me, but I was permitted to make copies of the lists of foreign correspondents. There was no trace of any secret code. But there were letters that suggested a secret headquarters and an unnamed individual to whom all questions of importance, and most financial matters, were referred.

I had the lists of correspondents typed out, and mailed a copy of each to Grim and Jeremy, together with a long letter of instructions.

HAVING mailed those, the next thing was to track down as many pupils of Bhopal Gosh as possible. So I hurried back to Boston, and with some difficulty persuaded the Indian Pananda to supply me with another dozen names.

The pupils whom I interviewed turned out to be in all sorts of professions. Several were extremely well-to-do. The more prosperous they were, the more highly they still seemed to think of Bhopal Gosh; a lawyer in particular was loud in his praises.

"Bhopal Gosh is a profound philosopher," he said. "He understands the law of

sequence and consequence. He is a great logician. He sees behind the trivial pretenses of so-called morality, and shows those whom he teaches how to avail themselves of universal laws, in business and in other ways."

"He has made money for you?" I suggested.

"My prosperity is due to his teaching."

"Have you made any money for him?"

The lawyer hesitated. "I may say I've had several dealings with him—eminently satisfactory, all above board and, from a financial standpoint, amazing."

"Do you know his present whereabouts?"

"No. He has discontinued teaching. Things he taught went to the heads of immature individuals, some of whom got into serious trouble; but that was not his fault. I haven't heard from him for weeks."

I found three of the ex-pupils in the penitentiary.

"I'm a crook," said one of them. "I pleaded guilty. But I wouldn't have been a crook except for that man. I paid him two hundred and fifty dollars for a course of lessons in how to be dishonest without being found out. That's all it amounted to. I was found out. I'm glad I was caught before it got worse."

The other two were even more indignant. One of them stated his intention of "laying for" Bhopal Gosh as soon as he was free again.

"The man taught what isn't so. He had two hundred and fifty dollars of my money, and I got five years. He's going to get eternity when I get out of this—you watch!"

The prosperous pupils were all full of his praises. The disappointed ones—and there were several—all swore he was an arch-impostor who taught dishonesty as other men teach chemistry or mathematics.

"And it's the hardest thing in the world to forget his teachings," one of them asserted. She was a woman, by the way. "He makes you believe that black is white by calling it gray and then leading you on by one step at a time. You catch yourself forever afterwards hesitating between right and wrong, wondering whether wrong really is as bad as it's painted."

None of them knew Bhopal Gosh's present whereabouts, not even the prosperous ones, all of whom admitted having let their teacher "stand in" with them from time to time in some successful deal or other.

"Why not?" was their invariable comment.

Bhopal Gosh had run no risks. He had taught a sort of hair-line course of crookedness, and left his pupils free to follow it. When they succeeded he fattened on their sense of gratitude. When they failed he let them go to jail. Until he murdered Gulad apparently he had let others take the whole responsibility while he shared profits only. From that time on the chase began to assume a new phase. Hitherto it had been a sort of intellectual problem, but now all my old hunter's instincts came to the surface, and I set out to finish Bhopal Gosh as personally keen on the job as if he had been a man-eating tiger. I made no bones about it. Didn't deceive myself. Gold plates or no gold plates, I was out to get my man.

THAT he wasn't going to be easy to get became more and more evident as I looked over the latest reports of the case in the New York office. Inquiries had revealed the fact, for instance, that he had no passport in the name of Bhopal Gosh, but that for more than three years a Bengali named Lajpat Shuddi had constantly renewed one, and the photograph attached to Lajpat Shuddi's application blank bore a striking resemblance to that of the alleged negro Simon Borrow. Ergo, Lajpat Shuddi, Simon Borrow and Bhopal Gosh were one and the same individual, and likely to prove an uncommonly elusive trinity.

That he was at large and in full possession of self-confidence was made clear while I was reading that dossier. The man we had left on duty phoned in to say that Mrs. Aintree had just had a long-distance call from Chicago. He had been interfered with while trying to listen in; some of her "meek ones" had come down-stairs and practically driven him away from the switchboard. However, he had found out that the call came from a public pay-station somewhere within the Loop.

I hurried around. Mrs. Aintree lied sturdily at first—said the call was from a friend in Springfield, Massachusetts, who was sick and wanted to borrow money. But she wilted when I threatened her with the police again.

"I'm not guessing," I assured her. "I know you had a call from Chicago. Was it Bhopal Gosh?"

She nodded.

"What did he say?"

"Mr. Ramsden, I won't—I daren't repeat it."

"Why not?"

"He forbade me!"

"Very well. You're helping him to escape the clutches of the law. I'll call in the police."

"Mr. Ramsden, I am not helping him! He is not guilty! He called up to tell me about the murder. He said it was unfortunate that the plates had been stolen, and that the murderer was probably too smart for the police. However, he said he is confident of finding the man, and meanwhile he himself feels that it will be wisest to lie low, both because suspicion may rest on him mistakenly at present, and also because he will stand a better chance in that way of catching the real culprit."

"Did you tell him there's a warrant out against him?"

"Yes."

"You promised me you wouldn't answer any communication from him without consulting me first!"

"I couldn't help it," she answered with rising anger. "You don't know that man! I do know him! I have a perfect right to tell him there is a warrant out for his arrest. Perhaps he will surrender to the police. Who knows!"

"Mnye-e-es! Who knows! Did you tell him anything about the other gold plate?"

"No. He asked whether the P. O. P. members knew that the plates had been stolen, and I told him 'no.' Then he said a little ingenuity would show me some way out of the predicament of having no plates to show to the members, and that he might send me a suggestion before long."

"What else?"

"No more. He rang off then."

"Has he ever sent you any money?" I demanded.

"Once. A sum to cover expenses."

"How did he send it? Check—draft—money-order—letter of credit?"

"In hundred-dollar bills by registered mail."

"From what postoffice?"

"I don't know. I threw the envelope away."

"When was it that he sent you money?"

"About three weeks ago."

"Have you ever seen his check?"

"Never. All the payments I have ever seen him make were in bills."

"Have you ever paid money to him?"

"Often. I have turned over contributions to him."

"Cash or check?"

"Cash, always. He likes notes of rather large denominations."

"Are those transactions shown on any book?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. He keeps the secret books himself."

"Don't you know where he banks the money?"

"No."

That closed another avenue of search effectually. The banks are thoroughly organized among themselves for mutual protection, and more crooks are caught with their aid than in any other way, but it was safe to say that we would have to run down Bhopal Gosh without the banks' assistance.

CHAPTER IX

"And if they all offers me a li'l sweet'nin', cap'n?"

DOWN on the southern deserts of this country there is a reptile they call the Sidewinder. He's a rattlesnake by habit, history and profession, and seems to like it, not having changed his habits since the first Conquistadores came. His chief characteristic is that he invariably heads south when traveling west. Besides, he carries a rattle on his tail, packs a murderous disposition and has all the other rattlesnake peculiarities.

We became Sidewinders. We had Mrs. Aintree, basking hardly in the sun but in the limelight of importance. She would have been happy on the gallows if only a fair-sized crowd were there to stare at her. We carried that gold plate along, with the idea of rattling it until every darky and most of the white folks in the towns we visited should be aware of it, and us. Our party pretty nearly filled a Pullman car, which made a fine long snake of us, of assorted colors. And we headed south while traveling west. The murderous disposition was a poor thing, but mine own; and by way of fangs we had some Smith and Wessons straight from the factory in Springfield.

The car that we engaged, and that Meldrum Strange paid for, was one of those steel composite affairs with sets of drawing-rooms at either end and regulation Pullman berths in the middle. So there was plenty of accommodation for Mrs. Aintree and her party at one end, Brice, Allison, myself and three other white men at the other, and our dusky confraternity amidships, so to speak.

They were about as fine a collection of U. S. darkies as you could assemble anywhere. Some had been to college; some had worked for banks and suchlike institutions; some had been the rounds of vaudeville, and half a dozen of them had rustled soft coal in the bowels of foreign-going ships. We knew all about every one of them from the day he was born; more than they thought we knew in certain instances—for example, that our middleweight prize-fighter and cleverest cornerman had served a term in jail—and we had every one deeded up as a full-fledged member of the P. O. P. They ranked as "aspirants," in good standing, subscription paid, and knew the secret ritual by heart; in fact they invented quite a lot of new stuff on the train, for the benefit of small-town hicks who hadn't yet received the latest light.

Brice turned out to be a splendid traveling companion, and Allison a tolerable one, although Allison could see no humor in the business, and was much more exercised over the expense than Meldrum Strange, who had to stay in New York but was paying for it all.

"Man, the ineequity upsets ma mind. It's a blasphemous and beastly or-r-ganization run by the very hoore o' Babylon hersel'. That's bad enough. But we add the offense o' squanderin' dollars as if money weren't the verra blood that should be cirr-culating in the veins o' ceevilization!"

He regarded every man with us as a religious renegade, and himself as the worst of all.

"Brice is a pagan— I've long had ma doots o' Brice—a good, brave little body but a her-r-etic in matters o' releegion. I rue the day I said I'd go with ye on this expedeetion, but a man's worrd is his wor-r-d, and there's no takin' it back. But Lord forgie us!"

He was the sort of man who would have endured the rack a couple of centuries ago rather than yield on the interpretation of some obscure Greek particle in one of Paul's Epistles—the kind of man who came over to this continent and founded a new nation out of guts, resource and pure pigheadedness. He went in fear of hell that whole long journey, solely from a sense of duty and determination not to be outdone by Brice. He reminded us of our sins a little too frequently, but he kept us awake by preaching when we should have been asleep, and that, as it happened, provided us with the clue that solved the problem in the end.

ONE of the members of Mrs. Aintree's party—the meekest of them all and the most obsequious in looking after her—was a man named Carter. According to Brice he was the individual who had told Grim too much in Jerusalem and so had started our investigation rolling. He had made up for it since by the most painstaking discretion; in fact, he seemed afraid to comment on the weather without getting Mrs. Aintree's permission first. He was a silver-haired man, somewhere between fifty and sixty, who always wore a black morning coat and carefully creased trousers, but economized on pocket-handkerchiefs.

He had a way of walking about the car, treading cat-wise, making no noise, and if ever we left the door of our drawing-room open he would trip past two or three times, glancing in, smiling and saying something pleasant if we noticed him, but, if we didn't notice him, only too glad to get by without saying anything at all. I won't say he aroused our suspicions, because after the event you always think you were suspicious from the first; that's human nature. We told one another we had suspected him, but I'm inclined to believe that we fooled ourselves on that score.

Allison refused to sleep in a compartment by himself because he had the gold plate in his satchel, and Brice, being rather tired of him in some ways, begged me to take turns sharing the responsibility. So the first night out Allison and I slept together, and Brice alone; but there was a door between the two compartments that we left unlocked. Brice, having nothing to worry about, and not being a nervous sort of man, forgot to lock the other door of his compartment leading into the corridor.

Brice was in compartment A, in which the three of us had sat talking all the afternoon. I had the upper berth in compartment B, and Allison the lower, with the satchel under his pillow; and for a long time after we put the lights out Allison lay underneath me, quoting pessimistic verses from the Book of the Lamentations of Jeremiah.

Now I'm not a miserable-minded man. It gets my goat to have to listen too long to a sermon on original sin. I believe in original decency—monkeys are perhaps descended from man, for instance, certainly not man from monkeys—just as I believe in original gold in the everlasting hills. The only thing I ever knew, except toothache, that could make me sleepless is just such a sermon on the baseness of the human race as Allison got off his chest that night. So I lay awake, listening to Brice's snoring and wishing that Allison hadn't set his suit-case so as to keep the door from closing by about an inch. But I was too lazy to get down and move the thing.

It was about midnight when I heard the door of Brice's compartment open softly. For a moment I thought it was Brice on the prowl. But he snored on, and I heard the door click shut again, as if some pussy-foot had sneaked in. Then Allison, fast asleep, started pitching about as if undergoing in imagination all the torments foretold by Jeremiah. I took advantage of that disturbance to get down from the upper berth without making much noise, and instead of opening the door between the two compartments, which would only have scared the intruder into flight, I slipped out into the corridor through the door of compartment B, closed it behind me, and walked forward to the door of compartment A.

I moved the latch, and let the door swing open as if the intruder hadn't fastened it behind him and the motion of the train had done the rest—then stood back in the dimly lighted corridor and looked in.

It was our white-haired acquaintance Carter, black morning coat and all. He heard the door swing open, but I was in time to see him withdraw his hand from under Brice's pillow. He started to close the door again, and actually had his hand on it when he caught sight of me.

Now I've met with gall from Maine to Shanghai, all the way around the earth and back again—all sorts, all grades, and all degrees; but nothing to equal his. I guess you've got to be meek before you can think of such a thesis as he propounded.

"I came to stop Mr. Brice from snoring," he said. "He's annoying Mrs. Aintree."

Mrs. Aintree's compartment was at the front end of the car, at least fifty feet away, and between ours and hers were thirty colored men, putting up among them such a saw-mill chorus as you'd never hear anywhere outside of a lumber camp or a kraal in Africa. I pushed him back into Brice's compartment and turned the light on, locking the door behind me.

"Well, really!" he exclaimed; and Brice woke up with a start.

THE next thing Allison came stalking through the communicating door with an old-fashioned dueling-pistol cocked in front of him. In his pajamas, with that pained, intense expression on his face and his long nose following the pistol's aim, he looked like one of those cartoons of a Frenchman hunting sparrows that they used to print in England when Fashoda was the main topic of discussion. I asked him to put the pistol away, for I've seen accidents happen with those things; but he wouldn't listen to me.

"Well, really!" remarked the silver-haired intruder for the second time.

"Ye'll know it's real when ye've a bullet in ye!" answered Allison. "Disar-r-m the man, one of ye!"

You might as well have talked about disarming an old woman. If he had had a weapon—and he had none—it would have been perfectly safe to leave him in possession of it. He wasn't exactly frightened, he was more like Daniel in the lion's den, obedient to what he considered first principles and confident that some way of escape would open out—a much more difficult kind of man to deal with than the blustering sort, who always throw their hands up when weapons fail.

"Sit down in that corner," I said, "and tell us what you were looking for under Brice's pillow. I saw your hand under it."

"The chiel was sear-r-ching for the gold plate!" put in Allison contemptuously. "That answer's too obvious to need confir-r-mation."

"Let me go, please," said our unwilling guest. "I am a member of this party with

a perfectly legal right to come and go in the car as I please. I came in here to stop this gentleman from snoring. Let me go, please."

Allison swore under his breath. Brice looked at me whimsically.

"Did Mrs. Aintree send you on this errand?" I demanded.

"She couldn't sleep. She asked me to do what I could about it."

An idea occurred to me that instant. If you call it intuition, that doesn't explain what intuition is, any more than calling the differential calculus a method of fluxions brings you closer to an understanding of it.

"You'd better get out of here," I said. "Knock next time you've any message to deliver!"

He walked out without comment, and I slammed the door behind him, opening it again instantly and stepping out into the corridor to watch. He never once looked back. The impression I got was that he was hurrying to reach his own end of the car before he should be seen by someone else. If that was so he didn't make it.

As he passed midway down the car the curtain of a lower berth drew back, and a kinky, dusky head appeared. It wasn't curiosity that drew that head out, but conspiracy. The difference in expression of those two emotions is far too wide to permit of a mistake. Carter appeared disconcerted—really disconcerted for the first time—whispered something hurriedly, and passed on. The kinky head grinned and retired inside the curtains, but only for a minute, for as soon as Carter had regained his own compartment I went and pulled those curtains aside again.

"Sam!"

"Thah?"

He had two false front teeth, which he removed at night, and couldn't speak at that hour without lisping.

"Follow me down to compartment A."

He struggled into his overcoat, looking more like a chimpanzee than a human, although owning a good-natured grin that offset certain other peculiarities. His pug nose resembled a dark piece of india-rubber and looked as if you could punch it steadily for an hour or two without causing its owner much inconvenience. He had a retreating jaw that must have been hard to hit in the prize-ring, and one cauliflower ear. Nevertheless, his bright little eyes gleamed with unusual intelligence, as I backed him up against the door of our compartment.

"D'you want to get back into the Federal prison, Sam?"

"Don't know nothin' about no Federal prithon, thah."

"Well, I do know. Your term was reduced to two years and eight months for good behavior. You came out exactly a year and eleven months ago. The point is, d'you want to get in again?"

"Cap'n, how come you athk me that? Good conduc's ma middle name. Ah signed on thith heah outfit jes' cause you-all said as you wanted a good conduc' fightin' man. Ah's good conduc', an'——"

"Certainly. You were living straight, so we decided to give you a chance."

"That wath thertainly good of you-all, cap'n."

"Well then, why don't you reciprocate?"

"Rethiprocate, thah? Ah don't 'zac'ly get youah meanin'?"

"Does Mr. Carter, or does Mrs. Aintree know that you've been in jail?"

"Mithith Aintree, she knowth it, thah."

"How did she find it out?"

"Cap'n, thay, it wath she what put me in! It was she what had me 'rested in the futht inthtanth."

"I see. So she came to you now with a proposal?"

"If you all want to call what she thaid a propothal, thath mebbe youah senthe o' humor, cap'n. Ah'd call it a threat, Ah would, jes' like that."

"Out with it! What did she say?"

"Thaid Ah might do her a thmall favor, an' 'lowed she'd do me a big 'un."

"Wouldn't let on about having been in jail, I suppose?"

"That it, thah, cap'n, 'zac'ly. 'F Ah'd send her li'l telegram byumby, thoon as she gives the word to let 'er go, she'll say nothin' 'bout my unfortunate ekthperienthe."

"Telegram to whom?"

"Dunno, cap'n, thah. Not seen it yet."

"Where were you to send it from?"

"Thome thathion along the line, cap'n."

"Cautioned you to say nothing about it?"

"Shoah did."

"Why didn't you come and tell me?"

"Cap'n, thah, you-all nevah said no word to me 'bout not thendin' no telegrams."

"That's true. That clears you."

"Goo'night, cap'n!"

"Wait a minute! Did Mr. Carter have anything to say about that telegram?"

"No, thah."

"Then what were you expecting from him when he returned along the car just now?"

"Ah don't 'xac'ly know, cap'n. Mithter Carter, he thaid, Mithith Aintree'th order, an' he'd go t'your compartment 'long about thith time an' get a li'l package f'r me to keep, an' along come mo'ning he'd tell me what to do with it. Mebbe ordahs 'ud be for me to take it off'n train an' go thomewheres, but he'd let me know 'bout that. Then he come 'long an' ain't got no parthel, an' he look tho dithappointed I come mighty near laffin' in his face."

IT SOUNDED true. Sam Carson had fallen foul of the Mann Act, which like many other laws unavoidably lends itself to blackmail and occasional injustice. When Strange investigated Sam's references and discovered that he had been in jail, even the deputy prosecuting attorney who had secured Sam's conviction admitted that there might have been a miscarriage of justice. He had eloped into another state with Mrs. Aintree's colored maid at a time when he had a fairly large cash forfeit posted for a match against one of the most notorious ring-sharpers in the game, and the combination of circumstances had been too strong for him. The woman was persuaded to accuse him, partly by Mrs. Aintree, who resented the inconvenience of losing her personal maid, and partly by the men who stood to keep Sam's forfeit money if he should fail to appear at the ring-side. Sam may have told the truth when he pleaded not guilty at his trial, and I was pretty nearly certain that he was telling the exact truth to me that night.

"All right, Sam," I said. "Take anything they give you. If they give you a telegram, get off the train and send it."

" 'F you thay tho, cap'n."

"D'you think you could make a copy of it first?"

"Ah ain't no writin' expert, cap'n. Fightin's ma peculiarity," he answered with a grin.

"Can you read?"

"Yeth thah, Ah can read good."

"Have you a good memory?"

"Ah can 'member mos' ev'rythin' ever happened."

"If they were to give you a telegram, and you were to read it over twenty or thirty times, d'you think you could memorize the whole of it?"

"Ah's a fus-class memorizer. Ah 'members the 'zac' wo'din' o' the telegram 'at Jack Johnson send to his ole mother, time he knock the stuffin' out o' Misto' Jeff at Reno. Ah 'members——"

"That'll do. The most interesting part of their telegram will be the name and address of the party it's sent to. Get that into your head so you'll remember it a thousand years, if you live that long. Then remember as much of the rest as possible. D'you get me?"

"Ah'll do ma bes', cap'n. Anything to 'blige."

"That's all, except hold your tongue. Don't say a word to a soul about your talk in here with me tonight."

"An' if they all offers me a li'l sweetnin', cap'n?"

"Take it. But no blackmail, mind! You're not to ask them for a cent. If they give you nothing, go ahead and send the telegram just the same. There are no side-pickings on this trip, unless you get hurt in a scrap later on, and in that case we'll take care of you. Are you all clear on that?"

"All cleah, cap'n. Goo' night, thah. Goo' night, gents."

He went off looking like a scarecrow in an overcoat with sleeves much too short for his long arms. Delight in being on the inside of conspiracy made him do a sort of double-shuffle down between the berths, and huge hands flapping at the ends of loose arms heightened the illusion. But he made good on the memory test.

They left us on a side-track at a wayside junction in Virginia in the early morning, and we had to stay there until nearly noon before a local "mixed" rolled in and they hitched us to its rear end *en route* for Appleton. Our gang piled out to invade the short-order places that stood three in a row within fifty yards of the depot, and that gave Mrs. Aintree a perfect opportunity. None of her party left the car, but Brice, Allison and I watched Sam go lolloping off toward the Western Union office, and presently he came back toward us muttering to himself.

We let him keep on muttering. It wasn't in the game to let the Aintree party

know that we suspected them of using Sam to upset our calculations. He looked well-paid and satisfied, and sat in the car with his feet on the seat in front of him, moving his lips like a monk at prayer, until a crap game started at the Aintree end, and what with one disturbance and another it looked safe enough to send for him to our compartment.

He stood with his back to the door, his enormous feet together, and his hands behind his back, displaying two removable gold teeth in a grin like a souvenir of Hallowe'en, and rattled off his piece as though he went by clockwork and had been overwound or something.

"MistoAntonioVittoriRDThreeLakelock CalDontPhoneSendByMessengerMessage PrepaidCostOfMessengerCollectDayLetter.

'XpectUsMiddleNextWeekSparksOrLittleLaterWillTryWireYouXacDateArrival ButAllCorrespondenceDangerousAtPresentStopMissingThirtySecondPlateAccompaniesInChargeRamsdenBriceAllisonAll WhiteAlertSuspiciousAdviseUtmostCautionStopThisInformationSentYouConditionalYourReciprocityStopWillRenderAll PossibleAssistanceDespiteGraveRiskBut Expec'YouIncludeMeInAnyFuturePlanOf CampaignAndConsiderYouHardlyInPositionToRefuseStopConsiderPOPNowWorthlessPersonSuperintendingThisTripEvidentlyHasPlanToUpsetAllHasMillionaireBackingAndWillDoJobThoroughlyStopBe SureGetInTouchSparksTakingAllConceivablePrecautionSignedYourPupil."

"What name and address were on the bottom of the telegram?" I asked him.

"Caroline Watts Nine West TwentyThird StreetNewYorkCity,thah."

Well, with the aid of a pencil and paper, and by dint of making Sam repeat the message over and over, it took about twenty minutes to make sense of it all. He couldn't remember it unless he said it quickly, and when he said it quickly it was totally impossible to understand him. To him it seemed to have no meaning anyhow, except that he had been told to keep the change out of a twenty-dollar bill. However, we got the hang of it finally, and let him go forward, well-pleased with himself.

Nor was Sam the only person who was pleased. If the telegram meant anything at all, it was that Bhopal Gosh's alibi and present address were now in my possession. I had never heard of Lakelock, but knew that Sparks is in Nevada, so it was fair to presume that Lakelock was somewhere near.

Caroline Watts was clearly the *nom de plume* of Mrs. Aintree. Antonio Vittori was equally certainly Bhopal Gosh. If I could once catch sight of the brute I didn't doubt I could corner him, so I decided to make Appleton, and after that to cancel all the rest of the schedule and head straight for Sparks, Nevada.

CHAPTER X

"Res egaliter omnibus!"

IT WAS nearly dark when we arrived at Appleton, among bleak hills that had been stripped of trees. There were a few truck gardens, the inevitable roped cows, unthrifty-looking goats by the dozen, and of course pigs, but nothing that resembled farming. It looked like one of those places that import everything in tin cans, milk included, and the empty cans made up most of the scenery.

Yet it wasn't such a small place. It had evidently spread during the war, and had begun to dwindle subsequently. All the straggling, outlying parts of the town consisted of mere shacks, no longer painted, and inhabited exclusively by colored folk, who had come there for wartime wages and remained because it was the easiest thing to do. There were rows and rows of empty cottages, and the white folks' houses, on a hill at one end of the town, wore a deserted look, as did most of the mines, although the pit-head gear in places appeared to be in working order.

Take it on the whole, Appleton was as perfect a place as you could find for brewing discontent. You could hardly be happy there if you tried, what with falling wages, falling population, falling houses, trade, ambition, everything. Mrs. Aintree pointed out her home—a large frame house on a hill-top, standing in considerable grounds, but empty, and I didn't wonder that she lacked desire to live in it. She said that her late husband had controlled half the mines in the place, but the coal was low-grade stuff and hardly paid for mining any longer.

Mrs. Aintree had engaged the town hall ten days in advance, and the place was

placarded with notices of a P. O. P. revival meeting that evening "for members and their friends;" but I turned our gang loose through the town to do a little word-of-mouth advertisement, and, having sat idle in the train so long, they were eating their heads off for mischief. The advance announcements of Noah's Flood probably sounded somthing like the news they spread through Appleton.

Mrs. Aintree seized opportunity to mail a letter. She said it was to her friend in Springfield, but she wore her dark look as she spoke, and I knew she was lying. The postmistress wouldn't give me any information, so I wrote a short letter myself to Meldrum Strange and registered it. While the postmistress copied the address into her book I got a look at the previous entry, and, as I expected, it bore the name of Antonio Vittori, Lakelock, California.

That was perfectly satisfactory. However quickly we might get away from Appleton, it was a certainty that mail would reach the border of California ahead of us, for our car would be hitched on to local trains and dandled to a dead march across the continent. The more time Antonio Vittori-Bhopal Gosh should have to mature his plans, the more likely he would be to fall into our trap. Mrs. Aintree had served the purpose so far perfectly. It would be time for her to send another telegram a day or so before our premature arrival on the scene. So I didn't tell her anything about our change of schedule until after we left Appleton next morning, and Sam received private instructions in the mean time. When she did give him a telegram he kept it in his pocket until I gave the word to send it off.

The P. O. P. was a platform for her self-esteem and no more. She cared nothing for the disappointment of her dupes. Only her own predicament disturbed her seriously, and she believed that her only port in the storm was partnership with Bhopal Gosh, the man who had supplied the brains from the beginning. She realized as well as I did that the one gold plate we had with us would be an irresistible temptation to the man who had the other thirty-one.

Bhopal Gosh probably knew Sanskrit. If so he could appreciate and probably had told her that the stolen thirty-one plates were unintelligible without the thirty-second, the key plate. He probably told her in imaginative oriental phrases how stupendously important the complete set would be; and as a matter of plain fact he could hardly have exaggerated. The original law of Moses, engraved on gold, could be used to produce a more effective world upheaval than any scrap of paper signed at Versailles. Consider what the Mormons did, and are doing. What Mahommed did. And there are others.

Mrs. Aintree had faith in Bhopal Gosh and his adroit intellect. She trusted him to contrive some means of stealing it. Her one remaining chance of wielding the world-influence she craved was to help Bhopal Gosh and then, if necessary, blackmail him. Otherwise her folly in consenting to make the journey with us in that car would be inexplicable.

Money did not appeal to her much except as a means to a definite end. The end that she never lost sight of, was self-importance. She yearned to be looked up to—admired—reverenced. She was willing to go through anything, to compromise to any extent, to condone any wickedness with specious argument, provided only that her own sense of importance should be bolstered in the end. And Bhopal Gosh, who knew that side of human nature, being built of just such stuff himself, understood, and laughed at her, as the sequel proved.

Of course, this is *ex-post-facto* analysis. It is extremely easy to deceive yourself when looking backward and imagine you were wise about it all from the beginning. The truth is that I had some uncommonly discouraged moments and, for instance, while we were waiting for our evening entertainment I went and interviewed the chief of the Appleton police. I took him quite a long way into confidence.

IT WAS a hectic evening from the start, for Darktown turned out and filled the hall long before we got there. According to the chief of police there had been nearly a score of free-lance agitators in the town during the past few weeks, every one of whom had left a standing grouch behind him.

So they were ready to be preached to. They wanted to be told that heaven lay just beyond the hill and could be reached by revolution. We had our own men scattered about the hall before it filled, and one or two of them made alleged impromptu speeches before the opening ceremony, with

the idea of keeping good humor as near the surface as possible; for it was a risky game we were going to play—the sort of game that follows better on a joke or two than on solemnity.

Our fellows had the ritual down fine, and had even improved on it. It had mostly been designed by Mrs. Aintree with a view to the superstitious appeal, and in order to lend solemnity to her ridiculous pretensions. For instance, after a dreamy hymn, there was a solemn parade around the hall in Indian file, each man doing the lock-step with his hands on the shoulders of him in front; that was supposed to represent the wanderings of Israelites in the wilderness for forty years, and it might have gone right well on this occasion if our men hadn't interjected *sotto voce* jokes reminiscent of the A. E. F. One laugh led to another, and they drowned out the piano finally by singing the old songs that some of them had howled in France.

So by the time Mrs. Aintree entered, pompous as a peacock with her staff around her, they were ready for pretty nearly anything except serious business. We had ten trumpeters, who represented the Israelitish heralds sounding the blast that blew down the walls of Jericho. Five trumpeters stood on each side of the door, as she entered surrounded by meek white minions and followed at a decent distance by Brice and Allison carrying the gold plate framed upright on a tea-tray. I came last and received an ovation, although I did not know why until Sam informed me afterwards that he had advertised me as the "champeen heavyweight long-distance African golfer of the whole wide world."

At the sound of the first blast they all got to their feet. There were five more blasts while Mrs. Aintree strode up the aisle magnificently, at each of which they were supposed to shout: "Glory Hallelujah! The kingdom is at hand!" By the seventh blast Mrs. Aintree had reached the platform and they all sat down, throwing one leg over the other to signify that the walls had fallen and that all they had to do now was to enjoy the feasting and the loot.

There was quite an obvious difference between members and their friends. Members knew which leg to throw over which, for instance—a very important point. They also knew the responses, and were all the more readily tickled into ribald laughter by the new ones interjected by our men.

Mrs. Aintree came to the front of the platform, and stood there holding up a hand for silence. But silence was a long time coming. Circumstances were against her. The tattered old crimson canvas drop-curtain had not been raised to the full distance, and she stood exactly underneath the daubed, recumbent undraped figure of a fat and silly-looking Bacchus, engaged in pouring a stream of yellow wine out of a blue cornucopia. He was leering down at her. It was only a matter of seconds, apparently, before the stream of wine would splash on her head. The audience refused to stop laughing until somebody went behind and raised the curtain to its full height. Then—

"What is the sacred number?" she demanded in ringing tones.

"Seven!" they answered.

"Come eleven!" shouted one of our men, and a roar of laughter greeted that, which she did her best to ignore.

"Oh you little lucky, lovely, rollin' bones!" said someone with a bass voice like a bull's, and that pretty nearly brought the house down. However, she continued—

"How many are the tenets of the P. O. P?"

"Seven!" they answered.

"What are they?" she went on instantly, giving nobody a chance to interpose a joke.

The reply sounded like a Sunday-school class reciting the catechism in quick time:

"Brotherly love for all black races,
Brotherly blacks in 'portant places,
Wilderness once crossed is over,
Tired ones have a right to clover,
Handsome is as handsome does,
Whatever is good is good for us,
Res egaliter omnibus!"

(Even dog-Latin, you see, to give it a properly scholarly flavor.)

"Ah's agwine ride in dat omnibus!" someone shouted from the rear of the hall. "No moah flat-footin' them ole deserts! Ah's hit them ties too offen! Hee-hee! Ah's agwine ride!"

"Giddap!" yelled someone else.

"No, chillun, this heah's a motor-bus. Ain't agwine be no mewls this trip!"

"Honk-honk! Ting-a-ling! Pah-pah! Who ain't paid his fare?"

Mrs. Aintree tried to laugh it off good-naturedly, but her anger was rising. Her

frown betrayed her, and the audience realized that perfectly. They set themselves deliberately to annoy her, and succeeded beyond their wildest expectations.

She tried to make a speech, but they interrupted with cornerman remarks. The more she tried to brow-beat them with eloquence, the worse they got out of hand, egged on by our conspirators strategically posted to produce the most effect.

"My friends!" she began. "I have brought you a surprize from New York—or rather from beneath the sands of ancient Egypt."

"Ah trembles wid antiquity! Oh, hold ma hand!"

"You were promised the privilege of feasting your eyes on the thirty-one plates——"

"Wi' turkey on um, an' sweets, an' gra-avy— Oh you Tha-a-nksgivin'! Show me them eats!"

"—but we have a greater privilege in store for you tonight. Instead of bringing the thirty-one plates that were promised, and which would have been a cumbersome and difficult thing to do——"

"Not 'nuff room in dat ole omnibus! Plates no use anyhaow widout knives an' forks! Yah-hah! Mebbe 'Gyptians didn't use no knives an' forks. Fingers plenty good 'nough for them 'Gyptians!"

"—we have brought you the most wonderful thing in the world—the veritable key plate drafted by the hand of Moses himself—the original Moses—think of it!—and bearing a portrait of Moses done by an artist of his day, engraved on the original solid gold plate on which, in Sanskrit, an ancient tongue, are inscribed the key words by which, with proper understanding, the secret, mystic, marvelous writings on the other thirty-one may be interpreted!"

SHE paused for breath, and they were really silent for the first time. That was quite a bomb to spring on any audience, and there was quite a number of them in the hall who had been sufficiently filled beforehand with a sense of the seriousness of what they called their Pisgah Vision to have won the rest over, had she known enough to keep their attention fixed on the treasure, instead of redirecting it toward herself. But she was so constituted that she couldn't help herself, being quite capable of being jealous of an inanimate object if that should detract for half-a-minute from her own importance.

"Since I ceased to live among you," she resumed, "being called elsewhere to higher duties——"

"Leaky ole roof needs mendin'—wouldn't spen' 'nuff dollars on de ole roof, that's what!"

"Tenant, he's gone too! He said, '—— ole house not fit for man to live in!' He va-a-moose an' pay no rent!"

"Some's been dug all the taters out o' tater patch. Yeah! No more taters!"

"Win'ows all bus' in! House begins look like he's ha'nted!"

"Rats in dat ole house bigger'n possums! O-o-oh!"

"—I have always had a kindly feeling—more, a passion in my heart for Appleton——"

"Doggone ole slag-heap ain't got no passion lef'. Kiss muh, honey Appleton, an' say goo'bye! Ah's gwine follow whar Lady Luck done up an' went—she's mah beau!"

"—and therefore it is you, from out of all the hosts of lodges of the P. O. P., who are the first to set your eyes on this priceless heirloom of the centuries!"

"Oooh! Our eyes ache lookin' at yuh, honey boy! Moses, yo' sho' resembles Lady Luck's gen'lem'n frien'! Ooey! You is good to see!"

"Dawgonnit! Dat stuff's yaller go-o-old! You-all done hear dat, niggahs?"

I patted my hip-pocket, which was bulging rather ostentatiously as I stood at the end of the line next to Brice and Allison, who were holding the tray between them. Allison nudged me and moved his lips as if I were responsible for the safety of his only child, and for a moment I feared he intended to snatch up the plate and decamp with it, which would have started a riot almost certainly. But in the pause that followed the last negro's remark, Mrs. Aintree swept into her stride once more. She was full of courage of a kind, that woman, and not minded to be laughed out of countenance.

"But you seem to be in an impudent mood tonight," she went on. "Some spirit of unrest has made you forget your manners. You seem inclined to overlook the fact that I have come all the way from New York at tremendous cost and inconvenience to show you what many other men—and white folks too!—would almost give their eyes to see! I find you in no mood of reverence.

The years I spent among you, teaching, must have had effect, but tonight you forget yourselves! I bear no malice; but I see no humor in your stupid jests, and you certainly can't expect me to stand here and talk to you unless my words fall on properly attentive ears."

"We's lis'nin', honey! We's de lis'nin'est folks what is!"

"Yah-hoo! Mah haid's stuff' up wiv lis'nin', an' I ain't heard nuffin' yet!"

"Silence! Order! Niggah, shut yo' mouf!"

"And so I think it better for tonight that one of your own people should address you. Perhaps you'll give him a more attentive hearing. Perhaps when you realize how deeply one of your own people is impressed by the sacredness and vast importance of this relic that you are being privileged to see—perhaps then you will listen to him more respectfully and try to show your appreciation of the unheard-of good fortune that is yours tonight."

She stepped back a pace or two, and one of my men at the back of the stage produced a chair for her. Allison and Brice took chairs as well, but I didn't care to sit down, for I knew what was coming, more or less, and the others didn't—least of all Mrs Aintree, who supposed I had provided a speaker capable of undoing the P. O. P. with faint praise.

But my man stepped forward from the rear with a grin on his face that might have disillusioned her if she hadn't been paying so much attention to the set of her skirts. He was a big, stout darky—a college graduate—who had spent most of his time trying to force his way on to the legitimate stage, earning his living meanwhile in small-town vaudeville, with occasional side-excursions as a member of a quartette and, now and then when times were bad, a spell of ballyhooing for a one-ring circus. He had a magnificent barytone voice, and was not only dressed in evening clothes, which suited his ambition finely, but was drawing the best pay he had ever come in contact with outside dreamland—Tom Tulliver by name, as decent and as clean-living a colored man as I want to have any dealings with, and an expert in the psychology of his own race, as well as a born actor.

"FOLKS!" he began, and if he had been a white man with burned cork on he could have held any audience after that first word. "I wuz agwine to call you jokes, but you-all ain't funny enough for that. You ain't got 'nuff 'nthusiasm to crank a car with. You ain't aware o' all your opportunities, what stands heah starin' yo' in the face, an' you all gapin' back at 'em wiv eyes as bright an' lively as fried aigs stuck on yo' faces!

"This heah's an epoch, that's what this is—an epoch up an' beck'nin' yo'. And an epoch is as diff'runt from a she-poch as di'monds is from the loser's end of a game o' crap. You've all met up wiv shepochs; there ain't no use o' my standin' heah tellin' you 'at shepochs ain't no good. Ah'd be a-wastin' o' youah time, an' time's the valuablest commodity what is, 'specially in this heah flourishin' an' hustlin' community. We're dealin' wiv a *he*poch, an' that's somethin' else again, as the Jew said when he saw the fire department comin'.

"I ain't agwine to waste youah time. I ain't agwine to waste nothin'. Ah's jes' agwine tell yo' all—ah's jes' agwine point out to yo' a half-a-dozen o' the leadin' circumstances what this heah pictchah as yo' all see dazzlin' yo' optics means. An' then ef yo' ain't the gratefullest niggahs what is, ah's agwine be the mos' mistakenest one.

"This heah's Moses. You all done heard o' Moses. He led the chillun o' Isr'el into a lan' 'at wuz flowin' wiv milk an' honey, after he'd showed 'em how to plunder the 'Gyptians. An' the 'Gyptian police what chased 'em to recover the di'mond brooches an' the watch-chains an' the stick-pins as they'd 'dopted 'fore they made their getaway was flummoxed by de good Lo'd an' drowned. Plum daid, ev'ry one of 'em, an' the chillun of Isr'el 'scaped.

"They wuz 'Gyptians, those police was. Mebbe the p'lice in this heah lan' o' bondage is all 'Gyptians too. I ain't looked 'em over 'nuff so's to be able to give yo' stric' information on that point. You'll jes' hev' to make use o' your discriminations an' diskiver that point for yo'selves. But that ain't the point izzac'ly as I wuz drivin' at.

"I'm agwine discuss wiv you tonight about Moses. He killed a 'Gyptian p'liceman—did it easy, 'cause the p'lice in those days didn't have no shootin' irons, an' Moses was that indignunt, what wiv the cop's fresh line o' talk an' one thing and another, that he smit him good an' hard. He nonplused that 'Gyptian, lef' his carcase lyin' there, an' beat it. The 'Gyptians sicked their bloodhounds after him, but

the dogs in those days hadn't no more nose than jackrabbits, an' Moses giv' 'em the ha-ha, tendin' sheep so's to have somethin' in the envelope when pay-day come aroun'.

"He tended sheep for forty years out on a ranch somewheres, till the statute o' limitations run out an' his pictchah in the rogue's gallery wuz all faded—an' him so changed, what with the mean livin' on the ranch, and him growin' a beard, an' gettin' older, an' gettin' a new suit o' clo'es—till them 'Gyptians couldn't recognize him no more. Then he come back, 'cause the ranchin' weren't the fondest thing that he wuz of by no means. He was plum fed up with it. But he knew more'n he once did. There's wasn't nothing you could tell him 'bout sheep.

"Well, he come back; an' he found the ol' house up on the hill, where he used to live, all fallin' to rack an' ruin'—win'ows busted in—no more taters in the tater-patch—rats runnin' roun' big as possums—place looked as if it wuz ha'nted; an' Moses looks aroun' an' sees a lot o' sheep on two laigs, workin' for the 'Gyptians. That started him off thinkin'.

"He went an' sat up on top o' the big Pyramid an' figured it all out, watchin' them Chillun of Isr'el workin' so hard for the 'Gyptians down below there; an' finally he came to a conclusion, them bein' things 'at any feller comes to when he makes his ol' bean work furious. An' Moses, he wuz plum furious all through. He didn't want to go back an' live in that ole rack-an'-ruin shack of a place, full o' rats an' ha'nts an' no tater-patch nor anything. So he come to a conclusion, Moses did, an' him knowing what he did about sheep, he mighty soon got busy.

"Pretty soon he had all them Chillun o' Isr'el chippin' in to a fund, an' him keepin' the money, an' he says to 'em, 'What's the use o' you all makin' bricks without straw, when Ah knows a place where yo' kin all live easy without doin' a stroke o' work—an' all the honey an' milk yo' wants? Supposin' you-all down tools an' come along o' me,' says Moses. An' he shows 'em how to plunder the 'Gyptians first, him havin' no more feelin' o' pugnaciousness about p'licemen an' rather they'd do it for him. An' by-an'-by he has 'em comin' after him like sheep, all carryin' the brooches an' the gold earrings, an' they come to the Red Sea, an' he gets 'em over, an' the 'Gyptians is drowned, and they's all singin' an' lookin' forward. An' then he says to 'em, 'March!' says he, an' bes' foot forward, for you can't go back or the cops 'll get yo', so there's nothin' else for it!' An' he keep 'em paradin' in the desert there for forty years.

"Walkin' the ties in Arizona weren't nothin' to it, for there weren't no ties nor yet no water-tanks. There weren't nothin', 'cep' jes desert, an' mebbe sage-brush, an' insec's, an' rattlers an' all kinds o' pizen-snakes; an' when they did come on water it was all full of alkali so they could hardly drink it. And there weren't no bootleggers, chinks an' dagoes, sellin' 'em liquor to sweeten their stomachs. No, sir, them Chillun of Isr'el did their hikin' bone-dry; an' they plum wore out ole Moses wiv their complainin' an' all till he quit cold; an' he was all that fed up wiv 'em 'at he wouldn't have no funeral or nothin' but 'lowed he'd find himself a cave somewheres an' go an' die in that.

"But 'fore he died he took 'em up on Pisgah mountain, an' he says to 'em, 'Thar's y'r promis' lan'; go fight for it, yo' suckers!' An' he shows 'em the promis' lan' a mighty long ways off, all full o' folks they'd got to 'xterminate. 'Tweren't no big lan' neither. An' they couldn't see no honey 'less they worked to git, same as they did in Egyp'.

"Now, here's the point I'se comin' to. 'Tain't no little lan' we're aimin' for to git. We'se agwine git us a continent! When it comes to spoilin' 'Gyptians fust, we ain't magpies pickin' here an' there an' flittin' off, we's wholesalers! We're chesty. We're gwine he'p ourselves proper! They ain't nothin' we's agwine leave behind! We's agwine laff at ev'rybody, p'lice included! We're the really true an' only genuine P. O. P., which O stan' for omnibus an' means we's agwine take ev'rything, an' ride, not walk! The white folks in this lan' o' bondage is agwine sit still an' lock the p'lice inside the station house, so's we kin do it easy—jes' as ea-easy, as sayin' it!

"An' hike? Say; who are yo' kiddin'? We'se agwine ride the whole way! How come, you s'pose, that German fleet got sunk 'way over thar in Europe? Did you folks never hear nothin' 'bout dispensations? That wuz one o' them dispensations. We'se agwine lif' that fleet o' ships right up from th' bottom o' the North Sea, an' use 'em. How come? How's we agwine fer to do

that? Eeasy! Jes' as ee-asy! We's agwine put tubes down under the sea an' blow those ole ships fuller o' hot air than a b'loon is o' laughin' gas, an' they'll come floatin' up to the top jes' like a lot o' ducks. Then we's agwine ride in 'em to Africa. That's what! Them's our omnibus.

"An' Africa? Oh boy! That ain't agwine turn out to be no delusion. We's all agwine be kings an' emp'rors when we gits there. Sure! Ev'ry lazy good-for-nothing coon 'll have an elephant to ride on, an' a big umbrella over his haid fer to keep the sun off'n him. There'll be eats enough to go 'round', an' no work to do but rollin' bones jes' to keep the money circulatin'. I ain't foolin' yo'! An' that's all gwine come about jes' 'cause o' this heah pictchah on a gole plate what white folks had fetched f'm Egyp!"

By that time he had to keep pausing between sentences to let the howls of laughter die before he could get another word in. The whole hall seemed to be rocking to and fro with mirth, and about the only two people in the place who weren't grinning from ear to ear were Allison and Mrs. Aintree. Allison could see no humor in it.

"Are they all dementit? Is the body makin' jokes?" he asked me behind uplifted hand.

And Mrs. Aintree could see nothing in it all but gross indignity inflicted on herself; nor could I blame her, especially as she floundered straight into the mud-puddle that I half-feared she would see in time. She went in with a splash—all two hundred pounds of her, and the noise of it gave birth to silence for about ten seconds.

"Stop!" she thundered, with both fists raised. "I'll not have another word of this! It's bad enough to have to sit here breathing this atmosphere without being insulted as well! I'll summon the police and have the hall cleared if I hear another word of sacrilege and treason!"

THAT turned the trick. The twenty or thirty "initiates" and "aspirants" who had seen their way clear to an easy living on the strength of her unusual doctrines, and who even yet had hopes, perhaps based on money unaccounted for, began to take Mrs. Aintree's part noisily. About fifty men got to their feet. Allison whipped the plate off the tray and stowed it in his satchel.

"Take that precious plate out of here!" bawled Mrs Aintree. "Take it away from their profane eyes!"

She was half-crazy with wounded vanity, but if she had been wholly mad she couldn't have made a worse break from her own stand-point, or a better one from mine.

"It's our gole plate! It's the P. O. P. gole plate!" somebody bellowed, and there began a rush for it as sudden as those gusts of wind that pick up a dust-whorl in the desert. It was exactly simultaneous with a rush by our own men, who reached the platform first, and just about sixty seconds in advance of an invasion by the Appleton police, who kicked the locked door open and wasted no time on preliminaries.

It's no use telling me there won't be fights in heaven. 'Twouldn't be heaven if that were so. Valhalla! We had to wade in! That crowd had had its laugh, and the laugh had kept it good-humored. But you'll find it safer to take a beef-bone from a wolf-hound's jaws than to disillusion any swarm of men, colored or otherwise. The more they have laughed while the disillusioning went on, the swifter and the fiercer the reaction afterwards. Half those fellows realized that they had been made fools of from the first by Mrs. Aintree; others didn't know what to think, but decided to get the gold plate anyhow. The mob-spirit accounts for the remainder. They all came on the run, some of them hurling chairs at us over the heads of the men in front.

It was one of the toughest jobs I ever faced, to get that gold plate and Mrs. Aintree out of Appleton town hall without injury to either. Sam was a wonder. He took the corner of the stage where the flight of steps led up from the floor, and none who saw him, or who met the calculated, swift ferocity of his attack, could ever more wonder why he wasn't wanted in the ring that time when they pocketed his forfeit money and railroaded him to jail instead. But there were too many of them, even for him; he got an ugly slash with a razor, and I had to leave Mrs. Aintree to the gang's protection and go to his aid. Since they had drawn razors I had no compunction about using chair-legs, and I bucked the swarm, brandishing one after the style of Samson when he slew those thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass. Only no ass' jaw, nor chair-leg could break

a black man's skull, swat you never so emphatically.

The surprizing part was that nobody pulled a gun on us. I had a pistol in my pocket, but didn't propose to use it against our own invited guests, except perhaps as an absolutely last recourse; and there was never a moment's real doubt of the outcome, with the police working their way toward the stage with the aid of night-sticks, going through their mob-drill like automatons, and turning suddenly at intervals to drive the rear of the mob out into the street. I daresay the whole business was over in five minutes, but it was a jewel of a fracas while it lasted; a jewel of a speech, too, that the chief of police made from the front steps of the hall to the disgruntled remnants who remained to rub their heads and hear him.

"An' that's the last of this P. O. P. foolishness we'll have in this town, if yez have any sinse at all! Wan more word about it, an' I'll P. O. P. pop the lot of yez into the coop, an' what with foines an' jail-sintences ye'll wish ye'd never heard o' Moses, let alone seen his photograph! Get along home now, all of yez, an' step smart! And as for you, ma'am," he went on, turning on Mrs. Aintree, "I'm sorry to say I'm ashamed of ye! Ye ought to know better, for ye've lived here long enough. I knew y'r old dad an' your husband, or I'd say more. Good night, ma'am!"

He turned to me last, accepted a cigar, cocked it upward at the stars between his teeth, and grinned.

"We'll have peace here for a while," he said; "but ——, that's a wonderful pair o' fists ye have. Where the divvle did yez learn to use 'em?"

CHAPTER XI

"Man, the plale's gone!"

I WON'T go so far as to pretend that relations as between Mrs. Aintree and myself had been exactly cordial hitherto. They had not. But up to the point of that lodge meeting in Appleton we had been able to observe the amenities. We had presented to the world at large a reasonably amicable front. She detested and despised me, and while I did not overestimate her charms or her integrity I was rather sorry for her, so we had managed to exist on the same Pullman car without exploding.

But to be made ridiculous was too much. I had committed the unforgivable offense. She hadn't a forgiving disposition at the best of times, but I had passed the Rubicon. She could no longer look at me without glaring; could not even see me without muttering; could not frame polite words in answer to the customary social salutations; and, on top of all that, she was imbecile enough to suppose that I wasn't alert for her vengeance.

It is only the secret enemy who is dangerous. The man or woman who makes faces at you, or defies you openly, is as easy as a rattler to contend with, for you have had notice. Her lust for revenge was as venomous as concentrated snake-juice, but she seemed to think herself possessed of a fairy-book cloak that rendered her hatred invisible.

A half-witted man would have realized the absurdity of her continuing another mile with us unless she were planning to upset my calculations.

When I canceled all arrangements next morning, and had to send sheaves of telegrams to shorten our itinerary and provide connections that would take us by the shortest route to Sparks, Nevada, it must have been obvious to her that I had some other motive than to break up a P. O. P. lodge meeting. The P. O. P. was done for. Ridicule would finish it. Sparks, according to our reports, was the center where the movement had made less progress than anywhere else. But such people as Mrs. Aintree—and there are lots of them—are more fatalistic than the Moslem, and ascribe every unexpected move to a calculating Destiny.

She wanted to get to Sparks. I had changed all plans and decided to go to Sparks at once. Therefore, obviously, Destiny was playing her game, and in due course would deliver me to destruction, ably and vindictively assisted by herself. If you look around you'll find any number of people who habitually argue with themselves in some such way as that.

There began to be a sort of surreptitious glee observable in Mrs. Aintree's manner—a confident cocksureness blended with the hate, that would have forewarned an ostrich with its head stuck in the sand. She began to make an awful fuss over Sam, dressing his wound about three times as often as was necessary, and flattering him with honied words for having fought so nobly, as she

expressed it, in defence of womanhood. Sam liked it. There never was a darky who didn't enjoy that kind of treatment. But when she gave him a telegram to send to Sparks he brought it to me immediately, and I let him keep it in his pocket for several days before dispatching it.

Antonio Vittori, Lakelock, California. All arrangements suddenly changed. Expect whole party at Sparks evening of thirteenth. Confident in your ability to devise and arrange solution. Count implicitly on me to carry out instructions, but would like them as soon as possible. Your pupil.

FROM the morning of our leaving Appleton until the thirteenth the railway people treated us to the loser's end of every gamble on connections. But we reached Sparks at last after an almost endless crawl across sage-brush desert that lies waiting for nothing but pumps and persistence to make a new Garden of Eden of it, and almost before the train rolled to a standstill half-an-hour after sunset our game began again in earnest. They cut our car off, and bunted it in the direction of the engine sheds—then trundled it back into a bit of rusty siding, where we could stay until Sparks became paradise, if we happened to feel that way about it and for all that anybody cared.

A fellow with a neck like raw beefsteak crossrabbeted into furrows allowed that that would do, and turned his back to superintend the moonrise, and there we were—plus the local sheriff, two Italians—one of whom looked like a bootlegger and the other like Dante come to life again—and, marvel of all marvels, Terence Casey stepping forward out of semi-darkness, like a ghost in an old-time play!

"Yes, me boy, the —— it's me, an' a fine fool's errand ye've brought me on! Not send for me? I know ye didn't! Did ye write to Meldrum Strange, though? Did he sind five-an'-twinty telegrams to Washington, until they transferred me to this job, or did he not? And did I take the Overland, an' arrive here a day ahead av ye? I sure did. And of all the ——'s own places to have to waste time in, this is the devil's choice, or my name's Moses, same as so many o' your friends'! I'll introduce ye now to Mr. Arthur Brandon, county sheriff. Maybe ye don't know a man any longer when ye meet wan. This is him. Sheriff, this is Mr. Jeff Ramsden, ex-iliphant-hunter and now lunatic at large; watch out f'r his grip, he's hefty!"

I looked straight into the eyes of the real West, the quiet, all-observing eyes that are used to vastness and afraid of nothing. He was as big as I am, standing with two fingers of his left hand hitched into his trousers pocket. His right came forward slowly for me to shake, and I liked him, warts, freckles, wrinkles, old gray flannel shirt and all.

Forty years old, or a little more, with eyes of twenty-five; skin like leather; a ready smile; and a way of standing that pretended nothing, asserted nothing, except his own faith in the universe and his permission to all concerned to share it with him if they chose.

After the manner of his kind, he said nothing, conceding the first deal, or shot if you like, to the stranger.

"I'm watching those two whaps," I said. "It may be one or other of them has a message for some one in the car; so if, I want to know it."

Casey took that hint and drew apart to observe both car-ends from a point of vantage.

"I hope Casey has saved time by telling you most of the details of this business," I said, and he nodded.

"Casey and I had a talk last night, Mr. Ramsden. He doesn't seem to think much of your alarm."

"Are you willing to look into it with me?"

"You bet."

"Do you know a man named Antonio Vittori, a dago living just over the border at Lakelock?"

He nodded again.

"Yes. Quiet man. Great studyer. Eye-talian, not a dago. They say he's all right."

"He's the man I'm after."

"——! Supposed to have murdered a colored man, isn't he? Do you figure that killing is always a crime, Mr. Ramsden?"

"I guess you and I would agree on most points, if we had time to discuss them," I answered. "Antonio Vittori is an Indian."

"Is *that* so?"

"I'm here to convince you. How far does your authority extend?"

"No further than the borders of this county. But there'll be no difficulty about getting the California bunch to help us out. You expect this Antonio Vittori here tonight?"

"Maybe. I suspect those two Italians. Are you sure he's not in Sparks this minute?"

"We can find out. Does he figure on killing a few more coons? I notice you've brought along a lot of live-bait."

"We've a gold plate with us that he's nuts on. He killed that colored man to get the rest of the set—but the set's worth not much more to him than bullion without the one we've got, and he knows where it is. I believe he'll try to get it."

"New York State warrant in order?"

"Sure. Federal warrant, too, I believe; ask Casey about that."

"We'll take him and see what's in this. Well, Casey, what d'you make of it?"

"Ramsden's right. That whap with a face like Montezuma passed a letter to Mrs. Aintree. She's writing. He's on the platform waiting for an answer. The other whap beat it; I guess he's gone to tell some one that the letter was delivered."

"We'll soon see."

The sheriff turned to one of his assistant deputies, who was leaning against the side of the car, chewing tobacco and listening alertly without asserting himself in any way.

"Shorty, I think it's up to you to follow that Italian who was here a minute ago. D'you know where he went?"

"Shore. I c'n see him now."

"See where he goes, and bring me word. I'll be here awhile yet."

The deputy walked off without comment, rolling himself a cigaret as he went, resembling by no means a salaried proponent of the written law. He looked more like a dry-goods clerk on his vacation, except for a certain measured litheness in his walk.

"Just a minute," said the sheriff. "There's one thing I can do right now."

HE WALKED to the end of the car—the end that he had been watching across my shoulder—and reached it at the same moment that the Italian with the Dantesque face began coming down the steps.

"What are you doing?" he demanded. "Been stealing a ride? No? What have you got there?"

"Allrighta, boss, I jus' taka letter, thassall."

"You —— liar! You've been stealing!"

"No, boss! Honest to God! Strika me dead, I taka da letter."

"Cut the talk! Prove it!"

The Italian pulled an envelope out of his hip pocket. The sheriff snatched it out of his hand, glanced at it, showed it to me, and gave it back. It was addressed in a woman's hand in pencil to "Mr. A. V."

"All right. You get by this time."

The Italian hurried off.

"Have you got time to follow that man, Casey?" asked the sheriff, and Casey strolled away with both hands in his pockets.

"What did you figure on doing with this minstrel troupe you've brought along?" the sheriff asked me, and I countered with another question—

"Have you had any trouble in Sparks with a colored society called the P. O. P.?"

"Not what we'd call trouble in this part of the world. There's quite a number in the railway sheds. They hired an iron shack on the edge of town, and the talk in there went to their heads a bit. They got to pushing white men off the sidewalk. That was as far as it went. They don't use that shed no longer."

"Where do they meet now?" I asked.

"They don't. They were in that shed when we started to haul the uprights out from under it. There's a donkey-engine in the next lot, and we had a chain passed 'round the drum with a hook at the other end made fast to a couple of four-by-fours. They came out like black bats flitting out of ——, and since then they been kind of superstitious about holding meetings. Why do you ask?"

"My plan was, supposing you agree, to turn my outfit loose and let them get in touch with these P. O. P.'s. I hope to discover whether Antonio Vittori has been mixed up with the P. O. P. in this town. If so, we'll have another line on him, and——"

"——!" the sheriff interrupted. "Between you and Casey we've got lines enough. We'll pop over into California in my car, get a search warrant and a couple of deputies from over there, and look him up. If you've got the evidence, we'll fix him."

"Mrs. Aintree—she who wrote that note just now, and sent it by the Italian—is an accomplice of Vittori-Bhopal Gosh," I answered. "She has been sending him telegrams. He expects us here. He knows we've brought along a gold plate that he

wants. He'll make a desperate attempt to get it; and he has almost certainly made arrangements for getting away directly afterwards. He's a —— clever rascal, and the last person in the world to find cooped up at home at a time like this."

"What's your idea anyway?" he answered, scratching the back of his head. "To set some kind of trap for him?"

"I'd hate to get Bhopal Gosh without the gold plates, and he may have hidden them."

"I'll give you any help I can."

"This colored gang of mine is hand-picked," I answered. "Let them circulate and if they can find one of their race here in touch with Bhopal Gosh they'll send word that they're loyal P. O. Ps, and can steal that remaining plate and get it to him. He wants it badly enough to take a chance."

"H'm!. Sounds rather like trapping a bear with sealing wax, but maybe I don't quite get the value of that plate—to him, I mean. As you say, if he's half-clever we'd hardly find him at home. All right, turn your gang loose. You'd better caution them. We've been cleaning up this town. Some of the boys might conclude to make a fresh start."

Our colored crew were interested in one subject only at the moment—supper, naturally. They were standing around us close enough to call attention to themselves, and no pack of hounds at a day's end could have looked more wistfully anxious.

Brice and Allison were packing up, methodical men both. They always arranged their compartment as if they expected visitors. Allison liked to have his spare shoes and slippers at the bottom of the bag, with the things on top laid neatly, so the business of tidying up took time. I wanted to call them out and introduce them, and had turned to do it, when something occurred to put that for the moment out of mind.

THERE came a herd of colored men from the direction of the station platform, mostly in overalls, lurching along and laughing, obviously of one mind—a big, hefty-looking lot, and maybe forty of them. They approached our crew and began making the idiotic P. O. P. signs. In less than a minute there was a regular reunion taking place, with the sheriff and myself more or less in the midst of it.

"Things seem to be working out to suit you," said the sheriff.

I was looking about for Sam, he being the one who usually caught on to a notion quickest, and had just spotted him on the outside of the crowd, when Mrs. Aintree came hurrying heavily down the car steps and pushed her way toward me, shoving the darkies away to right and left as if they were so many ninepins. She was in one of her towering passions—full of what she imagined was divine fire—so wrathy with self-righteousness that nothing but her own ideas and her own convenience had any weight as far as she was concerned.

"You wicked devil!" she began, marching right up to me. "I suppose you are planning to stage another sacrilegious farce! Who is this man?"

The men of the West have manners. The sheriff drew back until he was obscured in shadow, and began to take apparently intense interest in the conversation of the darkies.

"You will pay for all your doings!" Mrs. Aintree went on. "You think you're very smart. I know your thoughts; you think the money and the praise you'll get for this is recompense enough for all the harm you're doing! You're being well paid for it, and you simply ooze self-satisfaction! You're a disgusting sight, Mr. Ramsden, let me tell you that!"

"I'll give you permission to tell me that, if that's what's troubling you," I said.

"Troubling me? I am far from troubled!" she retorted. "I am simply trying to stop you before you destroy yourself with your own wickedness! You could do good if you chose, but you choose evil. The way of the transgressor is hard, Mr. Ramsden! You are laying up hell for yourself, and I would save you from it if I could!"

She meant every word of it, although, by holding my attention she was also forwarding an almost perfect piece of cunning. I believe she was obeying orders. She caught her breath for another outburst, but there came an interruption from the other end of the car—behind me in the dark.

"Help! Help!"

It was Allison's voice. I went to the rescue, but I'm a trifle slow at starting and the sheriff reached the steps ahead of me, swung himself up by the hand-rail, and was first into the car. I brought up short behind him. The doors of compartments

A and B were fastened together, handle to handle, by a piece of stout wire twisted as if someone had used pliers for the purpose. It took time to unfasten them, for the wire was too thick to cut with an ordinary clasp-knife, and all the while Allison kept wrenching at the door from the inside, taking up the slack and making our work more difficult. However, we got both doors open at last, and Allison came stumbling out with blood all over his face. Brice was lying unconscious on the sofa, bleeding too.

"Have ye got him?" Allison demanded.

"Got whom?" asked the sheriff.

"Ye mean ye've let him get away? Ye mean— My God! D'ye know what's happened? Did ye not see where he went? Are ye stricken daft? Oh this expedeetion! I knew from the verra first it was for-r-e-doomed!"

"Sit down and tell us," said the sheriff quietly, pushing him by the shoulders while I gave a hand to Brice, who seemed to be recovering consciousness.

"Man, the plate's gone! There cam' a dark-faced loon through yon door wi' a girt stick in his han', and wi'out sayin' one wor-r-d he struck at Brice an' me as if we were cattle an' he a flesher wi' a pole-ax! I held up ma han' to save Brice, for the fir-r-st blow was aimed at him, an' there—look!—there's where the blow landed on ma for-r-earm. Then he str-r-uck me in the face wi' his other fist, an' grabbed ma satchel. The strap broke! Then he struck Brice, who was up an' comin' for him. Then he struck me again, an' we were baith unconscious for I dinna ken how long—an' then I tried to get out an' ca' for help, an' the door was fastened! An' so the plate's gone—the only one we had left—gone for good and a'! An' poor Brice dead—a good little man, a good little frien' was Brice; I'll not forgie' masel'!"

"Your plans don't seem to be going quite so good, do they?" said the sheriff, eyeing me with a dry smile.

CHAPTER XII

"Feller, you were right just now!"

ALLISON, whose arm had really received the worst damage, insisted on having Brice taken to the hospital and mourned over him like a lost child. Maybe in that way the edge of his grief over the stolen plate was softened in some degree, which was as well, for only antiquarians can guess what pangs he suffered.

However, neither the sheriff nor Terence Casey showed more inclination than I did to take the theft for what diplomatists call a *fait accompli*. Casey and the sheriff's deputy returned together, and Casey was the first to get the hang of the situation.

"Those two whaps just walked about town," he said. "They knew they were being followed. They were decoys. I asked your deputy to lock both av 'em up and they're in the coop now. There was nothing in the letter that wan av 'em carried. He knew it. It was blank paper."

"I get you," said the sheriff. "And these coons, I guess, were sent down here to keep the other coons from standing in the way inside the car."

"Then Mrs. Aintree came and bawled me out," said I, "to hold our attention while the trick was being worked. Bhopal Gosh sneaked up to the car from the far side, got a word in her ear, and—it all fits."

"Fits foine!" said Casey. "Just a minute."

Mrs. Aintree had shut herself into her compartment. Casey mounted the steps and rapped on her door. One or two of her meek minions tried to prevent him, but he kept on hammering until she called out "Come."

"You're under arrest—you and the lot av ye!" he informed her through the open door. "Where's that letter ye received just now by the Dago?"

He came out swearing and laughing alternately, and showed us a handful of ashes.

"She burned it," he said, "and darn her, she broke up all the ashes in the spittoon! Ye can photograph whole ashes, but not broken wans!"

"Well, there's no place in our coop for a lady," said the sheriff. "We'll leave her in the car, and I'll set some one to keep watch. We've about one chance to take Vittori, or Gosh, or whatever his name is. Nevada's kind of big. If he once gets into the mountains he'll be difficult to catch—have to send a posse after him and comb the woods. Home's the likeliest place where he'd cache the New York loot so's to have it handy for a get-away. He'll figure on beating back home—had his car parked somewheres close at hand. He'll aim to

pick up the loot he cached at home and head for California. That's my guess. Any o' you good at guessing?"

"Anyone you can phone to in Lakelock?" I suggested.

"Wire's been down since yesterday. Trees are always falling across the wires. Not much of a job to fix, but devil's own time to get there, 'specially when the gangs are busy. If Gosh has a high-powered car and his nerve—and it looks as if he had—he's going to be hard to overtake. My car's ready."

Taking one thing with another Bhopal Gosh had twenty minutes start of us, including five at a cafeteria where we threw some food into the car. Then we went like the fire chief to an "all turn out" alarm, with Casey and one deputy on the rear seat, and there was some " 'scuse it please" driving as we slipped out through the home-going cars of the railway hands and their families, most of them driven by women, and followed the trolley-line by way of Reno.

WE LEFT the Interurban standing still, and whooped through Reno out on to the concrete pike without having killed anybody so far. Then the sheriff opened her out, and we really took a chance or two past Steamboat Springs, where the vapor from the caldrons underground hung like great ghosts over the landscapes. The only casualty as far as Carson was a cat that ought to have known better. It was a black cat, and Casey swore seriously.

"If it had been a white wan, now, that would have been the same as killing bad luck. But ye've killed the good luck, divvle take it!"

However, at Carson we got news, and knew we were on the right trail. The sheriff drew up at a hotel where they once used to lay out the victims of shootings on the pool table, but now sell meals to ranchers' wives. There were half-a-dozen loungers in the bar busy bewailing the old days.

"Got anything to drink?" the sheriff asked.

"Nothing worth while," said the barkeep.

"Serve us some o' that. Anybody know Antonio Vittori—Lakelock way?"

"Sure." Two men knew him. "He passed through Carson in his car twenty minutes back."

"What sort of car? What make?"

"Didn't notice. —— He's no auto-thief? He don't need to steal nothin'."

"Big car or little one?"

" 'Tweren't a Ford—Hup—Overland—Reo—some such make—nothing a guy like him would help himself to. He's got money, I'm telling you."

"We'll get him! Come on. 'Night, you fellers. Did he go by Truckee or——"

"No, not Truckee. Up to the right—nearest way home I reckon."

We piled in, and the sheriff let her go again.

"That hill's going to slow him to a walk. Let's hope the gang's fixed the road for Winter; no small car can clear the ridges without slowing for them, and if that's so we'll nab him inside Washoe County. Up she goes! Feel this brute purr—never knew a son-of-a-gun like this for eating hills."

The conversation grew disjointed, for the sheriff set his teeth and drove to suit Jehu son of Nimshi. The fellows behind were clinging to the seat, for the road-gang had put the ridges in and every fifty or a hundred yards the car would kick like a cow pony just off grass.

The moon shone clearly enough to show the precipices on our left hand—sheer, gosh-grizzly things that fell away from under us for hundreds of feet with never a yard of clearance if another car should want to pass; and our lights showed hair-pin curves ahead such as made the reputations of the old stage-drivers. I kept my hair on by remembering that the sheriff would hardly use all that speed unless he knew the road intimately, but the little he said was scarcely reassuring.

"That's where the stage went over last June with eleven passengers," he said once. "Weren't missed till next morning. Boys found 'em all dead but one, and he's still in hospital. This next curve we're coming to's a ——. Hold tight! There, didn't I tell you. There'll be something happen there one o' these days; they ought to set that ridge about a rod this side of where they've got it. Tell those men behind to take a look at their guns. This Indian friend of yours may try conclusions. Darned good places hereabouts for a man to stand you up—that clump of

trees ahead for instance. A few shots through your radiator. Sit tight here now!"

We swept around a curve with a yawning cliff six inches from the near wheels, and saw the whole of the finest valley in Nevada stretched in moonlight a couple of thousand feet below. Ahead, the road curved to the left at last, and we could see it snaking along, nearly milk-white, for a mile or two.

"There he is! See his lights? He's in trouble. No, he's off again. Changed a tire, I guess. Well, we've got him now."

"Unless he takes to the woods," I suggested.

"If the sucker does that we've got him sure!" said the sheriff. "Holding a line through these woods is quite a trick; we'd have him inside fifteen minutes. Sit tight, all, I'm going to step on her!"

IT CAME pretty close to being his last act in this world—close to being the curtain on the four of us. We were still mounting, but the grade was not so stiff and the speed indicator touched forty-five, then nearly fifty as we slid into the shadow of tall sugar-pines that loomed above the road on our right hand. Then, neatly as the picture on a screen slips off and gives place to another one, we swerved aside and went headlong over a steep bank. There was lots of time to think. It was like riding in an aeroplane, with all that moonlit valley smiling up at us.

The sheriff leaned forward and switched off the spark as the car took a sidewise tilt in mid-air, and we crashed into splintering tree-tops. The car remained up there, with one front wheel spinning on apparently forever in the calm moonlight, dumping cushions, tools and us on to a ledge below that provided foothold for the friendly trees. I remember I thought it an awful shame that the trees should break our fall at such immense cost to themselves, but a fellow has strange thoughts sometimes in a crisis.

"That was a —— of a way we came!" said the sheriff's voice from somewhere in the dark beside me. "Look at where we left the track—'way back there! We coasted through the air forever, pretty near! My foot's busted. Anybody else hurt worth mentioning?"

"I'm killed!" said Casey's voice. "There's nothing holding me, but I can't move!"

The other man didn't answer, and I moved about trying to find him. When I stumbled on him he was breathing, and I lugged him and Casey to the sheriff's side, so that the two of us could feel them over, but you couldn't make sure in the dark.

"How did it happen?" I asked the sheriff.

"——. I caught sight of it too late. You remember we thought he'd changed a tire? All he'd done was fasten thick wire at an angle across the track, just high enough to ditch us. Smart, I'll say! Suppose you climb up and unhitch the wire before some one else comes along and gets hurt."

I climbed up. The wire was of the same thick gage that had been used to fasten the door-handles in the Pullman, and was wound three times around a tree-trunk, led across the road, and then made fast to a rock. If we had hit it straight we might have jumped or broken it, but the angle was such that you couldn't have hit it straight. Even going at slow speed it would have turned us outward over the side of the cliff, and it was nothing but the speed we were using that landed us among the trees instead of on the rocks this side of them. I let the wire down the cliff-side for a hold-fast, and clambered down to hoist those three men one at a time to the road. The sheriff came easiest; his ankle was very badly sprained, but he could help with two hands and the other foot. The other two had to be carried, and it took, I daresay, half-an-hour. Casey said he was in no pain, but felt numb all over, and the other fellow was obviously suffering from concussion.

"D'you suppose you'd be all right if I leave the three of you here?" I asked the sheriff.

"Sure. Going back for help? There'll be some one along in the early morning; we'll get picked up all right. Still, if you'd rather——"

"Will you be all right?" I asked him.

"Sure. What's eating you?"

"Then I'll go on. Give me directions how to reach that —— house. I'll go get him, or have a durned good try."

"Feller, you were right just now," the sheriff answered. "You and I would agree on most things. I guess I'll swear you in as deputy. Hold up your right hand; so, we'll call you sworn. Casey, you're witness. Remember: If you get him the California side of the line you've no

jurisdiction. In that case plug him and do the arguing about it afterwards. If you catch him this side, plug him, and there won't be no argument. Have you got a good gun? Take mine."

"This one's an old friend."

"Now remember. He may go slow now, figuring on having ditched us good. I guess he saw our lights as we went over. I hate to lose that good car. Listen: Five miles up the road on the right-hand side there's a shack belonging to a man named Norcross. If his phone's working, call up every police station within a radius of thirty miles, and get a crowd started on the way to meet you at your man's house. Maybe old Norcross 'll lend you a rig; but he's moody; you'll be taking a chance if you borrow his rig without asking."

"I'll take another chance or two," I said.

"Good boy. Now there's this: Bhopal Gosh may have his plans all laid for crossing Lake Tahoe by boat."

"How big's the lake?" I asked.

"Thirty miles by sixteen, and more than a mile deep where they've found bottom—coldest water anywhere—drowns you quick, and never gives up its dead. If he's got a boat, you try to get a car—take his maybe—and get around the lake to head him off. You'll be able to see his boat all the way across in this moonlight. Stop wherever there's a phone and keep the gangs wised up. Whatever you do don't follow him alone across the water. He'll spill you and you won't stand a chance. Besides, a bit of a wind across that lake 'll upset any but a stout craft, and the best are none too safe."

"How'll I find his house?"

"Can't mistake it. Follow this road about nine miles as straight as she'll take you. The side-tracks to the right all go to million-dollar huts where the Californians lead the simple life in Summertime. You keep straight on. His house is on the left, facing the lake. There's a garage in line with it big enough to hold four cars, and the house is a brown shingle affair with a ——— of a big roof pitched steep like a hillside. It stands by a clump of sugar-pines, and whether he's got servants, or any one to help him put up a fight I can't say. Get to a phone, like I told you, and then watch the place and wait for help to reach you. Good luck! It's usually luckiest to shoot first; remember that!"

"Ye owld amachoor daytective! I'll bet ye the drinks ye'll never get him!" murmured Casey by way of farewell.

I VERY nearly overtook my man at the end of about two miles, for he really did have tire trouble and a hard job changing shoes. I came on the discarded shoe with a loaded revolver near it that he had let fall in the dust when he took his coat off, and saw his tail-light disappearing around a turn not three hundred yards ahead of me. He was not going fast. Either his engine was badly overheated, or else he was sure of having killed us, and overconfident. But no matter how fast you walk, a car going at only fifteen or twenty miles an hour is going to leave you pretty nearly standing still, and I didn't catch sight of his tail-light again.

In ordinary circumstances I would have reveled in that walk, instead of cursing every bend in the road that only showed another bend as soon as you rounded it—and that again another bend beyond. Some six or seven thousand feet above sea-level, the air was perfect and the scenery as wild as any man could wish. I even saw a bear lolloping across the road in front of me, and hove a rock at him out of sheer envy, because he might enjoy the solitude, whereas I must hurry on.

I made what I took to be Norcross' shack well within the hour, but there was nobody home. I made noise enough to wake anyone a mile away, and tried to break the door to get to the phone, but failed. However, there was a gray horse standing in the shed, and a spider-wheel rig that would just about hold together as long as the horse refrained from coughing. So I wrote a note on a leaf from my note-book, saying that the rig had been taken by a deputy-sheriff and would be returned next morning, and drove away at a slow trot—the best that nag could offer. He had only three gaits anyhow; the second was a walk, and the third was to sit down on his rump between the shafts and think a while. So I let him trot, five miles an hour, or maybe six.

And try how I would I could find no telephone. All the places except one that I tried were unoccupied. In that place there was a Chinaman, who grinned and said, "No can do." He proved it, too, by letting me try the phone; it was as "dead" as Gulad the Abyssinian.

So I drove, and it began to feel lonely under those huge trees, with nothing to disturb the silence except an occasional wind-moan and the *clop-clop-clop* of that disreputable horse.

As far as my experience goes it's untrue that a fellow reviews his whole career in a moment of time when death looks him straight in the face. But this I have found true—that when you're going forward to what you expect will be a crisis, all the circumstances that led up to it review themselves whether you will or not, until you are sick at heart from recognizing half-a-million mistakes you made and two or three opportunities you overlooked. After I left the Norcross shack I daresay I thought of thirty better ways to bring Bhopal Gosh to account.

Nevertheless, strangely enough, and unexpectedly enough, I didn't experience the slightest fear, until the old horse trotted around one last turn between sepulchral pines and cedars, and on my left hand, in a clearing, loomed the house that must be that of Bhopal Gosh, if the sheriff's description of it was correct.

Then fear struck me like a cold breath. There were no lights visible. There seemed to be nobody about. But I could hear an engine purring in the darkness by the front-door, and the horse threw up his head and neighed.

CHAPTER XIII

"Lake Tahoe don't give up her dead."

IT OCCURRED to me to go at once and put that car out of commission. I might possibly need it for pursuit, but setting off one possible contingency against another it seemed wisest to dish the car. So I tied my borrowed Rosinante to a tree, walked up the drive, and tore out the wires leading through the dashboard to the switch. That was decidedly enough to delay Mr. Bhopal Gosh if he had not gone already.

However, as it turned out I made a mistake. I could have caught him handily by leaving that car purring away peacefully with its lights full on. But the minute I tore out that handful of wires the circular glow of white light cast by the lamps on the front of the house vanished simultaneously. It didn't occur to me until then that Bhopal Gosh would not have left the house in darkness, with all that illumination on the outer wall, unless there was something to be gained by it.

It's not easy to puzzle out the other fellow's motives at a time when the least false move is likely to lose you the game. A crook thinks crookedly. If you've spent your waking moments for thirty or forty years endeavoring to think straight you're out of harmony with a villain's reasoning.

All that I accomplished by extinguishing the light was to give Bhopal Gosh notice that someone was close on his trail. That glare on the house wall had been visible from the lake shore, a quarter of a mile away, and I now saw somebody come carrying a lantern from the lake toward the house. He was coming in a hurry—didn't notice that the lights had gone out until he nearly reached the road, still well out of pistol range, perhaps two hundred yards from where I waited. Then he saw my gray horse, for the moon had dispersed the shadow in which I left him standing.

I tried to figure out what I would do if the positions were reversed, but gave it up. I didn't know why he was returning to the house. I remembered one of Terence Casey's sayings that "crooks, me boy, *always* overlook *something*, for that's the natur' of a crook. Ye catch 'em because they blow their noses on a dead man's handkerchief, or some such idiotic stunt as that."

That didn't help much. Bhopal Gosh wasn't blowing his nose. In fact, I couldn't see him, I could only see the lantern. I watched the lantern steadily for several minutes, until it dawned on me that it was hanging from a twig and its owner had gone elsewhere.

The odds were now that he was hunting me. As he knew the ground and I didn't those odds were a hundred to one in his favor. I elected to stay where I was for the moment, between the car and the front door, listening for a footfall that would give me a hint of his whereabouts. I heard two sounds—first, the pop from the exhaust of a motor-boat engine down by the lake shore. But he hadn't had time to reach the boat. I decided that the boat was moored, with its engine running, ready to get under way the moment its owner should come.

The next sound came from the direction of my rig. I heard the shafts fall to the ground—a smart slap as somebody hit the horse—and then the click of hooves as the

beast started off homeward at an easy trot. It was like a game of Freeze-out—funny, if I'd been in a mood to laugh. I had put out of action a car that he possibly didn't want, and had demobilized myself as far as possible pursuit went; he had discovered that not more than two men were on his trail; for that rig would have broken down under the weight of more than two. And he had cut off my retreat.

What puzzled me most was, why he didn't make straight for the motor-boat. I heard his heavy footstpes over to my right behind a row of trees, and he was walking as if he weighed a ton, breaking twigs and crashing through the undergrowth like an elephant at feeding-time. I elected not to walk into that trap. Time was all in my favor.

IF I had been sure that he hadn't another car waiting at the rear of the house I would have headed for the boat at once and put that out of commission; but it was possible he was calculating on my doing just that, and did have a car in reserve; so I waited, not so much reasoning really as acting from intuition and habit developed in hunting days. It was that refusal to come out in the open and be seen that forced his hand. He had to try to unmask my batteries somehow, and took a rather silly way of doing it.

He began to scream like a beast in agony, pausing to wait for a reply and then screaming louder. As that had no result he yelled in English that he was caught by the leg in a bear-trap. If it was true I was glad to hear it; he might stay in the trap. I was certainly not going to be such a fool as to go and investigate; and what was more, he had done me the favor of demonstrating that he was all alone, for obviously any one within hail would have gone to his assistance; but nobody did go. He left off yelling after a few minutes, as a man at all prone to yelling would hardly do with his leg caught in the iron jaws of a bear-trap. Those things hurt.

Continuing to puzzle away at the problem I decided that he had gone down to the motor-boat to get the engine started, and had then come back to the house for his treasure. Perhaps there had been some doubt in his mind whether he could start the engine, and he had preferred to make sure before committing himself to that means of escape. If those heavy gold plates were in the house yet it was hardly likely that both he and they would escape me before morning.

But he had grown suspiciously quiet again, and I listened intently, wishing that contact with cities and railroads hadn't dulled my hunting ear. I could hear the motor-boat popping away steadily, but not one sound from Bhopal Gosh. The lantern, swaying gently on its twig, still burned brightly where he had left it.

His next move took me utterly by surprise. The porch light was switched on suddenly from inside the house, and I stood exposed between the door and the car at pointblank pistol range. I ducked around behind the car, astonished that I wasn't fired at; and, from that position, peering under the top, I caught sight of his face looking through a window to the right of the front door. I pulled the wrong pistol from my pocket—his that I had picked up in the road beside the abandoned tire—took a snap shot at him, and missed. But he didn't shoot back. It dawned on me that I had his only firearm! True to Terence Casey's dictum, the arch-crook had overlooked one simple, necessary point!

That settled it. I smashed in the window with the pistol-butt, and scrambled in, cutting my hand, but as luck would have it not badly enough to make it useless. The door at the end of that room slammed in my face, and I heard the key turn on the outside, but I took a heavy chair and swung it ax-fashion, breaking the door down in less than a minute. That let me through into the hall. He had switched the light off, and was doing something in a devil of a hurry, for I could hear his heavy breathing not far off. Then I caught the metallic hum of a safe opening, and the rattle of the handle of the inner, sheet-iron door as he fumbled with it in the dark. By the sound I judged he was at the end of the hall, so I fired the same pistol I had used before to try and catch sight of him by the flash—or hit him if I happened to be lucky.

What I did see was the wall-button that controlled the electric current. I heard another door slam, and by the time I had switched the light on Bhopal Gosh was gone; but he had not removed the plunder, although he did get away with the key to the inner door of the safe.

The safe stood under the main stairway, and was an inexpensive affair with a

combination lock on the outer door, which he had left unfastened in his hurry. I dare say I could have forced that inner door without much trouble if given time, but it seemed wiser in the circumstances to leave the treasure in there and return when I had reckoned with the man. He wasn't likely to be doing nothing while I fooled with the safe.

So I went back for another chair and smashed the door on the right-hand side of the safe that he had disappeared through. It was a good, heavy office chair with an iron revolving screw in it and iron-braced legs, so the door went down in short order; but at that I wasn't in time. There was a cellar below-stairs piled high with old, dry cord-wood, and as the door crashed outward a stinging cloud of white smoke met me with the crackling of blazing bark and splinters.

I charged through, with the idea of catching him before he could take advantage of the smoke to give me the slip altogether. I was holding his pistol in my right hand, having shoved it in my hip pocket while I used the chair for a battering-ram, making two pistols in one pocket, and as I rushed through I grabbed the first one that my fingers closed on. Bhopal Gosh was waiting for me just inside the door, and seized me by both arms from behind.

IT NEEDED no expert in intuition to guess what his game was then. He meant to hurl me down into the blaze below, and return for the contents of the safe. And it was a new experience to discover myself almost helpless in the arms of a stronger man. All up and down the world I have only met three amateurs who could beat me with their fists or on the mat, and they had to work for their laurels. But this fellow twisted the revolver out of my right hand with the ease of a gorilla, and flung it down the cellar stairs into the galloping holocaust below us.

"Yah-ah-ah!" he laughed.

But it was an expensive little joke, for as he let go my right hand to hurl the weapon away I swung sharp round to face him and crashed my fist into his mouth, cutting it a second time on his magnificent teeth, but giving him far the worst of the exchange. However, he had me by the wrist again before I could reach for my own revolver, and luckily—so swift he was—before he even guessed that that was my intention.

The heat was already terrific. Once or twice when a draft caught them the flames licked over the top of the cellar stairs, and he started to force me backward toward that hell, grinning in my face malevolently as he stepped forward like a great fat dancing-master—only it was muscle that made him bulk so big. It was the first time I ever felt really helpless in the grasp of a stronger man, and after the first strain that warned me of his enormous power I wasted no more energy on trying that issue with him.

I relaxed my muscles suddenly. By the light that roared behind me I could see the triumphant malice in his face; but he was in no hurry; he was enjoying the foretaste of victory—grinning like a great ape. You could see how he had been so easily mistaken for Italian by men who were not suspicious of an alias, yet his face grew more Mongolian as you examined it. And he took care that I should examine it, thrusting it close to mine in order to peer into my eyes.

"You feel the fire behind?" he sneered. The brute wasn't even out of breath.

"You are going down into it backwards! But we will wait just a minute or two and let the flames take hold, because there is a door leading from that cellar to the garden, and you seem to have a gift for breaking doors!"

He thrust his great, dark face still closer to mine, so that his enormous shoulders rose higher than his neck. I guessed him at fifty inches around the chest, with every other detail in proportion, but he may have been bigger than that.

"I am curious about you!" he went on. "You are not of the police. Are you one of those poor fools who discovered a treasure that they could not keep? You are too unwise for Providence—I suppose you would call it Providence?—to leave it in your hands! You would not know how to use it. I do. I shall use it! I shall leave you roasting here, and take it away with me! You're not talkative! It's your last chance to talk, you know, until you come into the world reincarnated as a beetle or a rat! You don't like the prospect of being burned to death? It terrifies you? Too bad! You would prefer the butt of Malmsey wine selected by the Duke of Clarence?"

Even the least astute of us become one-horse philosophers as we grow older. When any man starts boasting in my face I take

courage. Boasting is the inevitable prelude of disaster. I'm convinced of that, and an ounce of conviction is worth a ton of anybody's argument. I knew that minute that he might hurl me down into the fire, but if so he was coming with me, and I guessed I could face those flames as well as he could.

Maybe he read the determination in my face. He started there and then to force me backward, and I tried to throw him with a trick of the heel. He saved himself from that, but lost his balance and I got my left fist free, gaining a good two yards away from the flames and sending my left home three times, once into his wind, and twice into the region of his jaw. He had to let go my right wrist to protect himself, and I got my right home into his left eye before he closed.

Then, gripping like a bear, he began to force me backward once more, lifting me as my ribs cracked under his pressure. He had me under the arms, which left both fists free, and I rained blows on his mouth and eyes that would have taken some of the fight out of a Spanish bull. I guess I blinded him for the moment. I could feel the sickening scorch of the flames behind me as the floor-beams and door-posts caught; but I caught him by the neck and swung clear, and if I hadn't been in too much of a hurry he would have gone down into the cellar instead of me, for I drove for the region of his ear with my right fist, and the blow went wild.

Then I thought of my own revolver in my right hip-pocket, and he thought of all outdoors. The smoke and flame were blinding; the back of my jacket was smoldering, and I think his coat was too. At any rate, with his eyes half-shut and with the floor-beams beginning to crack under our combined weight, he lowered his head and charged me like a bull. Instead of meeting him with my knee, as I should have done, I stepped aside, took a shot at him, and missed! Missed him at fifteen inches! So much for smoke in the face.

WE BOTH went out of the house like rabbits running from a grass-fire, he straight by way of that nodding lantern for the motor-boat, and I after him, with the flames behind us lighting up all the windows now as they caught the draft from the open front door. It was only a matter of seconds before the whole house was a raging furnace.

I was out of breath, for he had crushed my ribs in badly, and on top of that I had swallowed a lungful of acrid smoke. What was worse, I am built rather for heavy work than running races; and for a man of his prodigious weight and strength he was fleet-footed. But he ran with his hands to his eyes. I had done him harm enough to equalize the odds.

Moreover, he wasted energy. His shortest course to the motor-boat was not by way of the lantern. In order to take the lantern *en route* he had to cover two sides of a broad-based triangle, giving him at least an extra hundred yards to run. Yet he did that, and I took the shorter route to cut him off, wondering what strange frenzy possessed him and supposing that his eyes might be so badly hurt that he was running half-blindly for whatever he could see.

Yet he didn't pick up the lantern. He paused there for half-a-second, tugging at something else that shook the lantern to the ground as it came loose from the tree, and carried whatever it was away with him. He was still in the lead by a dozen yards, and I tried a shot as I ran, with no result except apparently to increase his speed; and of course I had to slow down for a second in order to take aim, which gave him a few more yards of advantage.

I had now four shots left, and no spare cartridges. On the other hand, in spite of the pace, I was beginning to feel better as the smoke got pumped out of my lungs. Moreover, the fire by now was enough to alarm the countryside; they would turn out to save the forest trees if nothing else, and it was likely I would have help any minute. Yet he was gaining on me—careering like a hippopotamus for his own element, covering an ell to my yard as he crashed through and over everything. I never saw any man take such enormous strides as he did, and all the way with his hands before his face, as if I had done his eyes real damage.

He was easily fifty yards ahead when he reached the water's edge and hesitated before jumping to the beach below. In that uncertain moonlight, and with my hand no doubt trembling from the run, it seemed like a fool's chance to take another shot; yet I took it—stopped dead, aimed carefully, and fired. I hit him. He dropped something that was hanging from his arm,

clapped his hand to his side, and toppled sidewise over the bank.

I did that last fifty yards in record time—my record at all events. I figured on jumping on him from the top of the bank and finishing the business. But when I reached the bank he was clambering off a short plank pier into the boat and snatching feverishly at the lines to cast loose. He had made the boat fast in two places, which was in my favor, but he got both lines free and the instant he had thrown the clutch into gear and opened up the gas he crouched below the boat's side.

I remembered then that there is such a thing under heaven as horse sense. I could have easily wasted my three remaining shots in an effort to plug him, but the boat was a considerably larger target. I fired all three deliberately, plunk into the boat, and one of them damaged the engine.

It doesn't take much to stop one of those single-cylinder affairs. I hadn't done much harm to the engine, for he got it going again in less than a minute; but during that minute the water must have made headway through two bullet-holes, and by the time he began to pay attention to it the water was swishing all over the bottom. What with the state of his eyes and the darkness he couldn't find the trouble. For a minute or two after that he seemed to be lifting off the seat-covers and looking for a pump, but there was none, for he began bailing with a small tin can. Then the engine gave a final cough and quit for good.

I lit a cigar. I'm willing to take oath that if there had been a boat within reach I would have put off and tried to save him for the hangman. But there wasn't any boat. I daresay he had taken care there shouldn't be. And as for swimming—he might swim in that nearly ice-cold water if so minded; I tested it with my hand and knew that I for one couldn't stay afloat in it for two minutes.

One of my bullets must have done much more than bore a hole in the hull, for he could have bailed against two, or even against three bullet-holes. But though he worked like fury the water gained on him, and I could see the hull submerging inch by inch.

He lost his courage in the end completely. The chill of that rising water around his legs gave him too definite a foretaste of what was coming. He began to scream for help and to call on some Deity I never heard of. I tore two planks off the pier and hurled them as far as I could out into the lake, but he was a quarter of a mile away, and I doubt even if he saw me throw them. He could never have reached them anyhow.

He went down screaming, and the cold calm water closed over him with a ring of ripples that danced in the moonlight until the last, ever-widening circle nearly reached the shore. Then I turned to examine whatever it was that he had dropped when my bullet touched him, and clambering up the bank discovered nothing less than Allison's leather satchel.

YOU'LL be right if you suppose that I unbuckled the flap with trembling fingers. Maybe I shouted—I don't know—when I discovered the gold plate safe inside. But it was badly damaged. My bullet had struck it near one corner, ploughed through the soft gold for several inches, itself expanding as it went, and finally had gone clear through to expand its last momentum on the ribs of Bhopal Gosh. The plate had been further damaged when he dropped it, for it was bent out of shape, and I think he must have stepped on it, because a good deal of the scripture was obliterated. Nevertheless, it was the plate, and I had at least something to return to poor old Allison.

There was no more chance of recovering the other plates than of gleaning snow on the plains in midsummer. We had left the outer safe-door open, and the whole house was a roaring furnace. It might be possible, when the ashes should cool off, to recover a shapeless mass of nearly pure gold; but it was far more likely that the safe had tilted forward as the beams gave way underneath it and the stuff as it melted had run out and got lost so thoroughly that its recovery would cost more than the game was worth.

I tried to get some of the fellows who came racing to the fire to help find a boat and look for Bhopal Gosh, but when I told them sufficient of the circumstances they laughed at the idea.

"Never dragged a corpse out o' that lake yet, unless in the shallows inshore. The cold sets them solid. The body don't form no gas, and they stay down there a mile deep. No; Lake Tahoe don't give up her dead, and never will till Judgment Day."

So I borrowed a big car instead, and got

two of them to come back along the road and help me with the sheriff, Terence Casey and the deputy. Less than an hour later, as we drove dead-slow around a bend, I heard the sheriff's voice—

"I notice you got your man!" he called out.

Now I don't know how he knew that, nor would he tell me how he knew; but he swore that he knew it from the moment that our headlights came in sight around the corner. I asked the deputy about it, who was not much the worse for his experience by that time, and he laughed.

"Shore he knew!" he answered. "He weren't guessing. He told us two that you'd got your man 'fore ever he spoke to you at all. Didn't he, Casey?"

"He did that," said Casey. "It all comes o' running over that black cat. Any man in his senses knew that somebody was going to get the gate tonight. Well, Lord be praised it wasn't me! I'm due for me pension. Hey, steady! Lift me easy—easy, you! I'm not the inimy, Ramsden! Ye're after pulling me to bits!"

SO IF you should have the good luck to visit London one of these days, and should have the sound horse sense and taste to pass a portion of your time in the British Museum, turn first into the Egyptian Gallery. And if you see there in a glass case by itself a battered gold plate with a great trough plowed across it so as to obliterate the head and shoulders of what was once the portrait of a man, you'll understand how it came there. They have marked it, "Very ancient; probably period of Israelitish occupation; mostly illegible; purpose unknown." For they are cautious men who conduct that institution.

But there's a middle-aged Scotsman attached with no very definite duties to that department. They say he is rather a mental wreck, and has been more or less pensioned in that way. He'll tell you the whole story of that gold plate, and better by far than I have done. But better not mention my name to him, for he vows, and will vow to his dying day, that I know quite well where the rest of the plates are, and that I mean to unbury them some day and offer them for sale when I suppose the game is safe.

"But just ye watch!" he'll tell you, in case you should mention me. "I'll balk him! I'll expose the chiel! I'll bring him to his downfall yet!"

Brice, on the other hand, is still digging for antiquities in Egypt, and he and I are great friends.

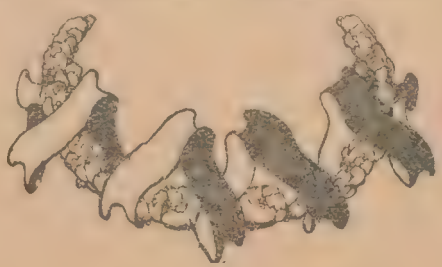
And if you should happen to meet Terence Casey—he'll be guarding a President, or tracking down a forger, or some such child's play—you might remember me to him; and if he says to you, as he surely will the minute that you mention me—

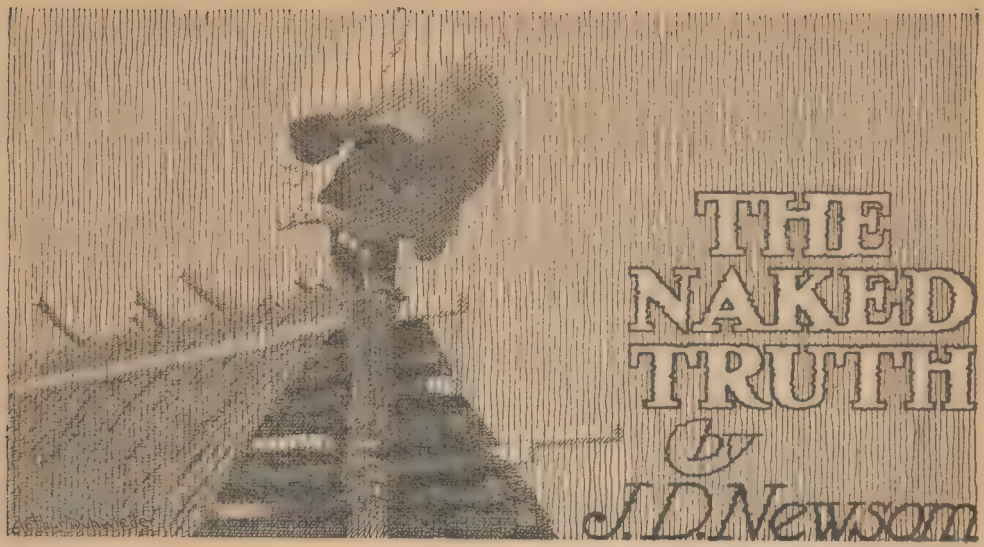
"My friend Ramsden is a well-meanin' man, I'll have ye know, and a good man of his inches. He knows a —— of a lot about ilyphints, and if he had his rights he'd be with a circus, or curatin' at the Bronx Park Zoo. But he's gone into the amachoor daytective business, and that's not a fit subjec' for conversation—not with prohibition running wild!"

If he says that to you, as he will, you might remind him that he owes me a round of drinks—a point that he unaccountably forgot when he came out of hospital. And you might add, that as good drinks are hard to come by these days, I'd be grateful if he'd come across.

And as for what became of Mrs. Aintree, and of the foreign entanglements of the P. O. P., most of which we had to straighten out before our job was done, let me remind you all once more of those Indian story-tellers, who invariably pause and pass the hat when it would seem that their audience has had its money's worth.

"*Kull khadami tilzam. Allah yihfazak;*" and may all your ways be peace!





Author of "The Odyssey of Chander Roy"

CONROY should have been content to derive his information from books and explain his mission in life to well-chosen friends in his club's smoking-room. Then he would have acquired a reputation, and his monographs on the advancement of civilization among native races would have been accepted without reservation.

As matters stand now, however, Conroy snarls when the word "native" is mentioned in his presence and in his more impassioned moments he recommends the use of poison or other foul means to rid the earth of his erstwhile "dark skinned brethren."

It all happened because some ten years ago when he was inspecting cattle stations on the fringe of the great Australian desert he was invited to witness the Aruntas' totem dance. Thereafter he ceased to be merely one of "new South Wales' farseeing financiers," as the Sydney papers called him, and acquired a mission in life. On the strength of his one close contact with aborigines he decided that they were unfortunate people, downtrodden by the brutal white races, and he brought a good deal of influence to bear to have their conditions improved.

Such was his enthusiasm that he read Spencer and Gillen's "Australian Aborigines" and looked at the wood cuts in Codrington's "Melanesians." People took him seriously because he had much money and controlled far more live-stock than any man should really be allowed to handle. He even wrote a couple of articles for a daily paper urging the abolishment of marriage by capture among the Cape York tribes and the establishment of compulsory education. Because he nearly succeeded his mission in life became an obsession.

He talked folk-lore at directors' meetings until somebody suggested that he visit some of the Pacific Islands and make a comparative study of existing conditions. As he had just cleaned up half a million pounds by selling out some Western sheep-ranches just before the big drought, he decided to act on the suggestion.

"I'll make things hot for the colonists out there if I find any slavery or oppression," he told one of his acquaintances just before sailing. "I'll raise the roof. People know me. I'll expose 'em!"

"Going to New Caledonia?" asked the acquaintance.

"Yes, worse luck. Got to go to Nouméa and transfer there to a schooner for Tanna in the New Hebrides."

"Why not stop off for a few weeks and look over the island?" queried the acquaintance. "We have a cattle-station out there at a place called Nakitalo. McLaird, our manager, tells us the interior is full of tribes who have never seen a white man. He could put you up. I'll give you a letter of introduction."

"Splendid!" boomed Conroy.

"The Naked Truth," copyright, 1922, by J. D. Newsom.

He was a large man with a heavy red face barred by a fierce, upcurling moustache, and he affected a broad smile which never quite reached his round, prominent eyes.

"Splendid!" he repeated.

"And if you think the place looks promising, and I assure you it is," added his friend, "we could talk things over when you come back."

"I'll think about it. Thanks for the introduction," answered Conroy who never allowed his mission to run away with his business sense.

So he went to New Caledonia and journeyed up to Nakitalo in a disgustingly dirty little boat which lurched and staggered in the slightest swell. For three days he was too miserable to admire the scenery, and the smell of food appalled him. The ever-changing panorama of jagged yellow hills, sharply outlined against the blue sky and the narrow green valleys where the graceful coconut trees stood guard at the water's edge, failed to excite his interest.

Once ashore at Nakitalo, however, with a fellow-Australian to talk to he became as self-assertive as ever. McLaird impressed him not at all, for he was a little, bald man, with very blue eyes set in a clean-shaven, weather-beaten face, and his voice was low and gentle. In fact, Conroy tended to assume command of the homestead and hinted at a change of ownership.

"Well, that'll be nice for you," murmured McLaird when he heard the news for the first time.

"Nice—it's a drop in the bucket, my good fellow," retorted Conroy, "a mere drop. You've probably worked on some of my ranches around Kalgoorie."

He named an imposing list of stations extending over an area of some thousands of miles.

"Your memory is still good," sighed his host without so much as a ghost of a smile in his blue eyes.

Those eyes at times really annoyed Conroy for they were unwavering and not in the least abashed.

Otherwise everything went admirably well. McLaird provided him with a half-caste boy from Maré to act as interpreter and turned him loose among the coastal tribes who knew the value of money and were quick to sense what the fat, red man wanted to know. They told him beautiful tales of oppression and cringed when they mentioned the *gendarme* who administered the district or McLaird, who gave them employment. They were sophisticated people with a craving for contraband rum and they retained few of their original customs, living in miserable hovels patterned after the *gendarme's* fort-like house at the end of the valley. But Conroy thought that it was all magnificently primitive.

He filled several large note-books with comments on native life and customs and devoted a lot of space to the tribes' economic life. As he paid the villagers five francs an hour to talk to him of their grievances they never failed to cluster about him when he walked down the village street and took his seat in the shade of a great banyan tree.

News spreads fast in the islands, and before long, in twos and threes, men began to drift down from the more remote villages in the foot-hills to acquire some of the fabulous wealth which was being poured out by this red-faced man. The newcomers attracted Conroy's attention for they were not dressed in the conventional blue loin-cloth and open mesh singlet of the coastal natives, but wore strips of bark cloth wound about their waists and carried queer weapons.

The local people seemed to resent these intrusions, but always gave way in frightened dismay when the hill-men appeared. At last they went to the hated *gendarme* and begged for protection.

'Master," they wailed, "the men of Vohlu are out again, and we walk in terror

lest evil befall us. Our war-clubs are gone and you are our father and mother."

And the *gendarme*, who knew the treacherous ways of the Vohlus, rudely broke up one of Conroy's friendly meetings and marched the visitors out of the village with orders to leave their weapons at home next when they visited Nakitalo.

Then the *gendarme* sought out McLaird, who was busy breaking in a new saddle, horse for the next season's round-up, and explained in explosive French that Conroy must not, under any circumstances, stir up trouble between the villages. It appeared that he had given the people of Nakitalo less money than he had offered to the hill-folk and things were not as quiet as they might well be. There was more drunkenness than was absolutely necessary, and the Vohlu were restless.

The *gendarme* wanted peace and quiet in his district, so did McLaird for the sake of his bullocks, but neither of them had taken Conroy's mission into consideration. He was beside himself with indignation and bellowed at the *gendarme* until the latter bellowed back and the air rang with the oaths of Marseilles and the curses of unregenerate Kalgoorie. McLaird sat on the paddock fence and smoked cigarets until the noise gradually subsided.

'Say," he called to Conroy in the same dispassionate voice he used for all occasions. "Say, Mr. Conroy, you don't own this place *yet*. I got to keep on friendly terms with the *gendarme*, so just cool off a little. He's quite right, too. I can't get any labor at all since you started throwing money at the natives. Talk to 'em all you like, but don't be so darned generous. I need labor."

"All right," he added in halting French for the benefit of the enraged *gendarme*, "I will guard him tranquil. *Comprenez?* No more *de le* noise. *Très bien, mon ami, oui?*"

The officer grinned good-naturedly as he turned to go and waved his hands to express hopeless disgust.

But Conroy felt that his great mission was being trampled upon. He was being forbidden free access to the natives by a glorified policeman and a herder of cattle who called Sydney the "Big Smoke" and couldn't lay claim to a bank-account. These ignorant men were afraid of him, his power, his reputation.

"No," he shouted at McLaird, "I will not be quiet. I am going to finish my investigation and I refuse, ab-so-lu-te-ly refuse to be deterred or coerced by you."

McLaird lighted another cigaret and smiled. His sunburned face creased and wrinkled into a thousand little lines, his small teeth gleamed and his blue eyes danced with merriment. No man, ever before, had dared to grin at Conroy in a temper.

"Laugh at me!" he spluttered. "Laugh at me—how dare you? I'll tell you what I am going to do!"

He was still explaining as the shadows grew long and the sun slipped down the side of a purple hill into the sea.

He was appalled at McLaird's callousness, he declared. He had seen enough to convince him that everything had been done or left undone to wreck the natives' standards and reduce them to slavery. On the morrow, he would go up to the Vohlu territory and see for himself exactly how these hill-people fared. No doubt but conditions were quite as bad up there.

He went to great lengths, repeating himself several times, to assure McLaird that he might as well begin looking around for a new job.

"As a drover perhaps you'll be a success," he snarled, "but you're incapable, absolutely incapable of holding such a responsible position as this where the future of a race lies in your hands."

McLaird finally broke his long silence.

"Come in to dinner. Food must be getting cold," he suggested as he jumped off the fence and walked away with an indifference which quite upset Conroy's calculations.

He followed dumbly, choked by the thousand things he still had to say.

After coffee had been served he launched another attack. He leaned back in his chair and eyed his host malevolently through half-closed lids.

"Your silence leads me to believe—" he began.

"That's enough," snapped McLaird. A change had come over him, his blue eyes were cold and merciless and his mouth was set in a thin, hard line. "I've put up with you for a week. As I said once before you don't own this place yet. Remember that.

"I've nursed you because you're out of your depth as soon as you step off an asphalt pavement. I won't bother to tell you

how wrong you are because it's waste of time. But get this straight—you are not going up-country tomorrow. You'd have to have a permit from the *gendarme*. He won't give one to a maniac like you. You're dangerous. You'd either get killed or start a rebellion. That's not needed. And I won't let you have that interpreter or lend you horses. The sooner you pack up and get out the better. Hospitality is wasted on you. Go back to Sydney and get control of this place before you come back. There's a launch going down tomorrow to Mbopari. You'll be able to shift for yourself there."

Conroy was amazed. This little man trying to bully him! He smiled tolerantly and blew a ring of cigar smoke toward the ceiling. No interpreter, no horses—that could easily be fixed. The *gendarme's* permit? What did he care for that? Had he not talked to some official at Nouméa who had assured him that he could go anywhere he liked about the island?

Without a word he left the table and went out to the stockmen's quarters where he found the Maré boy squatting at ease by the door.

They whispered together for some minutes and a wad of notes changed hands, silencing the boy's objections. Then he went back to his room and slept soundly. He dreamed a little of his coming journey through the hills and thought of the space he would devote to it in his book.

At dawn, carrying a heavy kit-bag, he tip-toed out of the house, down through the mist to the ford where he found the boy awaiting him with two horses. They lost several precious minutes strapping the bag in place, and Conroy cuffed his guide in his hurry to be away. He didn't want to be stopped now at the very outset of his real work. At last when all was ready he swung heavily into the saddle and cried out good-naturedly—

"Lead on, Apatwa, my boy, now we shall find our way to the truth!"

He raised his riding-crop and pointed ahead with a commanding gesture.

"Yassah," dubiously answered the boy.

"When we get back——"

Conroy got no further for McLaird, at a run, loomed out of the mist. In his hand he carried a murderous looking Colt which he leveled at the speaker.

"Come on, Conroy," he ordered. "Get off that horse!"

Conroy hesitated and he came closer.

"Come on," he repeated. "Get down."

But for once in his life he was caught off his guard. Conroy, bending forward as if to dismount, suddenly brought down the butt end of his heavy crop like a flail. It glanced off McLaird's head and crashed on to his shoulder. He fell to the ground and rolled over.

"That," muttered Conroy, "will keep you quiet for a while." And he urged his horse forward across the crumpled body.

KASSUI, chief of all the Tiukas, owner of twelve wives, squatted on the sacred stone seat before the men's sleeping-house and listened with wicked eyes to the reports of his spies.

"O Chief," said Ngoroto, a lean warrior with hair bleached yellow after the fashion of the Lifou people—a proof that he had traveled greatly, "I come from Vohlu. They have grown fat and lazy once again. Their men are weak and their women many. Their pigs would gorge our ovens. The way lies open before us to the very heart of their huts. We need heads for the shrine——"

"*Go ari*, I know," snapped Kassui tugging at his gray beard. "My son's new house will need its attendant spirit, and my father's soul calls for another slave."

For among the Tiuka a dead man should go in state to his heaven with an escort of prisoners' souls to wait on him, and no house is complete unless the skull of an enemy be stuck upon the ridge-pole to ward off evil.

"Is that all you saw?" asked Kassui after a pause. "The Vohlu are close to the valley, and the white men lend them their magic, I am told."

Ngroto laughed and spat scornfully.

"Wah! I watched for a week in the shadow of their skull shrine on the hill. They no longer honor their dead, and their magic is harmless. Do I not know? See——"

From his loin-cloth he produced a handful of human teeth which he threw on the ground before the chief.

The assembly swayed and shuddered. Who knew what might not befall? All were not as strong as Ngoroto to withstand evil. But an old man laughed shrilly and slapped his shriveled thigh in derision.

"O Chief," he cackled, "Ngoroto is strong. Already he has slain as many men as I have toes on my feet. He has much

honor among us—but he has no cunning!"

The crowd shrank back as Ngoroto arose grasping his war-club, but the old man still squatted on the ground and nodded at Kassui. He was Ngoroto's great-great-uncle by marriage and no stripling may strike such an one without losing his soul.

"What is your tale, old man?" grunted Kassui.

"This—" he answered. "While Ngoroto lurked by the deserted shrine, *I* went down into the village as one who comes in peace. Have I not a woman of the Vohlu in my hut?"

"*Wah!*" yelled the assembly, and the men stamped their feet in approval. Here, indeed, was temerity worthy of a man of Tiuka.

"And when I found my kin," went on the old man, "I saw a very fat white man sitting by their cooking-house. I made inquiries. He is neither a bearer of magic nor a spy but a fool who pays in the money of the French to be told lies. They sit about him all day and receive notes for their talk. It is said these notes will buy many things such as tobacco and cloth and rum—but who knows the truth when a Vohlu speaks?

"How did he come among them?" asked Kassui.

"He is said to love the Vohlu. He sought them out alone, for his guide fled when they reached the first little hills. He says he is the Vohlu's brother, but they will surely kill him when they need a sacrifice."

"His head," suddenly exclaimed Kassui, "shall go on my son's house, and we shall feast as we did of old."

He stepped from the sacred seat and hurried out of the village up into the bush on the steep hillside.

"He has gone to talk to our fathers," whispered Ngoroto.

"War!" shrilly cackled the old man, and the assembly clapped and chanted while the young men, three deep around the throbbing drums, danced the Eragi war-dance, which is dedicated to the ghosts of the ancestors who have died in battle.

The call was heard from afar. It was answered from remote hillsides and from lost villages. There came warriors with their clubs and spears, elders with the hideous masks of the secret lodges, keepers of sacred places, naked and daubed with red ocher. All through the night and all the following day they drifted in, gathering family by family, group by group until the tale was complete and not a man missing.

There followed a great feast while the elders took ghostly council at the shrine beneath the banyan-tree and the drums boomed incessantly. Then the elders returned to the round-house and the tribesmen, in a hushed silence, waited expectantly. Just before dawn, when the tree-tops began to take shape, Kassui appeared in the doorway. In his hand he held aloft a bundle—a wild taro to which had been bound a tuft of the red wooly hair of the flying fox and the broken shaft of a spear—the sign of war. Shout upon shout filled the air, and the drums spoke with a new voice as the young men stamped and swayed to the measure which called all men to the killing.

But war, even among the hill-tribes of New Caledonia, is a matter of preparation. Spies must make sure that the path lies clear, ancestors must be propitiated and omens be observed. The spears, the clubs and the throwing stones must all be placed for a second upon a certain carved rock that the spirit of the original founder of the tribe may enter into the weapons and guide them swiftly on their way.

All went well with the Tiuka. The yam harvest on the terraced hillsides was abundant, the warriors grew sleek and smooth-skinned and the corner posts of Kassui's son's house were put in the ground the day after his marriage; for no woman needs a home until her first child is born.

"The young men grow restless," an elder at last told Kassui. "All things are ready. We wait for a sign——"

"*Aie*," answered the chief, "it has come!"

And he sprinkled water over the fire in the men's house. The steam dissolved and vanished before it reached the thatch, proof that the ancestors had accepted the libation and the old men began to chant until the drums drowned their clamor.

That night the men of Tiuka swarmed out of their valley and dropped swiftly down the rocky slope beyond. Dark bodies gleamed here and there in the moonlight, occasionally a dislodged stone rattled from ledge to ledge or a spear rasped against a tree-trunk.

Before the cool dawn wind rustled through the palm leaves they reached the outskirts of the Vohlu village. There followed a rush and a yell and a scream.

Flames suddenly licked up the walls of a hut, a shower of sparks flew wide and roof after roof caught fire. By the red glare the warriors swept through the village, and the Vohlu died, squealing for mercy.

Long before the morning mists left the valley the village was reduced to ashes, where here and there a headless body sprawled in the open, and Mr. Albert Conroy, the farseeing financier, was being prodded none too gently up and up and up the mountain side, through thorny bushes and over sharp rocks. In a hysterical voice he cursed his captors, for he was clad in red morocco slippers and pink pajamas, which were rapidly shredding and disappearing as he clambered up the slope, and he was suffering acutely. To make matters worse he was herded with a score of Vohlu prisoners and as many of their lamenting women folk.

He fainted when the blazing sun beat down on his unprotected neck and two other captives were given the task of bearing him throughout the day. When he recovered he lay face down in the dust before the sacred stone where sat Kassui. Some one had thrown water over him and his hair hung damply in his eyes.

"*Wah!*" grumbled the chief. "Never have I seen such fat on any man."

Conroy sat up slowly gathering together odd strips of pink cloth which had clung to him to his journey's end. In a wide circle about him stood or squatted a crowd of men blood-stained, wild-eyed, with great head-dresses of cowrie shells and feathers. On the fringe of the crowd women hovered, watching him. Beyond the cluster of huts he saw the towering forest-covered hills penning him in.

A Vohlu man with his arms bound tightly behind him was thrust forward into the circle and cringed before Kassui.

"What is this fat man's magic?" demanded the chief.

"Great One, I speak the truth, seeking mercy," came the stammered answer. "His magic is great. He rules men of his own kind by virtue of tokens which he gives to those who serve him. White men pay him homage and one who lives near the coast at Nakitalo, a powerful man indeed, is said to be his slave."

"Where are these tokens?" queried Kassui anxiously.

In his haste to seek favor the Vohlu man fell into the trap.

"The tokens were burnt when his hut was set on fire," he answered.

"Can he create more?"

"Who knows? He had many with him when he reached us."

"Then tell him that unless he produce two fists full of such tokens he shall die, and his soul go to keep my son's house."

"And shall I live?"

"Tell him!" thundered Kassui, and the circle of warriors narrowed in.

So the prisoner made shift to explain the order to Conroy, who understood not at all.

'Notes—or we die. Money, French money—or we die," the captive repeated again and again.

Light dawned at last in Conroys' mind and a great weight lifted from his heart. These people were not as dangerous as he had been led to believe. They dared not kill him. They were holding him for ransom.

"Money? Why, my good fellow, where am I to get it? If they will send a messenger to Nakitalo they will be given a thousand francs. Also explain that unless I am released forthwith I shall see that these people are punished, severely punished. I cannot imagine how——"

"What does he say?" sharply queried Kassui. "Is it a spell?"

"No spell, Great One, but he cannot produce the tokens," answered the Vohlu man. "If you send to Nakitalo, he says you will be given tokens in handfuls for his release, for he is needed by his people. More I cannot understand."

"Make clear that unless the tokens appear now he shall die when my son's house is ready," retorted Kassui.

Gradually Conroy began to understand. He must produce money or die. Fear, icy-fingered, clutched at his throat and he tried to bluster and bully while Kassui gnawed at his beard and watched him with bloodshot eyes.

"He has no magic," miserably repeated the Vohlu man. "May I be spared, O Great One?"

For answer the chief raised his left hand, and a half-dozen spears struck down the shrieking captive as the warriors closed in to the kill.

Now Conroy, for all his vast experience, had never seen death, violent death at such

close quarters. Street accidents he knew and understood, for he had seen an old man knocked down and killed by an automobile in the busiest district of Sydney; but he could not face this ghastly horror. With distended eyes and drooping jaw he watched a warrior chop off the fallen man's head with one blow of a bamboo knife, saw them pick up the body and bear it away, heard the clamor of the other captives and then fainted dead away for the second time that day.

Thus he mercifully missed the great feast which took place that night when the Tiuka ceremonially ate their victims to acquire their soul substance and afterward danced to the sound of the drums, stopping frequently that each man might recount his deeds of bravery.

THE ensuing days, however, became one long nightmare. Another prisoner had been spared for a future sacrifice and through him Conroy discovered how and when he was to die. The surviving captive had a gift for graphic description, and Conroy was tortured by visions of his own bleaching skull adorning the new hut. He vividly pictured the last rite when he would be led out to his death surrounded by frenzied tribesmen.

To his surprize he was not harshly treated. True, he was kept under guard but the Tiukas, even Kassui, provided him with food and conversed with him through the Vohlu man. When he spoke of his great power in his distant home they grinned and chuckled.

The man of Vohlu, at once resigned and contented, worked in the fields with his captors and took up a definite place in their social system. He was given a wife and a hut of his own and lived apparently, on the best of terms with his neighbors.

His days were long before him, he told Conroy, for his soul would only be needed when the taro season came around. Meanwhile he was happy. He had food and shelter and a woman. Death came to all men, to each his appointed hour.

Conroy merely shuddered and glanced fearfully at the hut which his soul was to guard. The whole tribe worked spasmodically at its construction. For days it stood untouched, then a score of men would work at it, singing lustily while they lashed and pounded and chopped. Conroy grew depressed and frightened. The remnants of his pajamas and his slippers had long since vanished and he went about clad in a strip of bark cloth, which a native woman, laughingly, had thrown to him.

Gone was his mission and his love for primitive people, gone his desire to help and improve them. In his mind he evolved drastic disciplinary systems to curb and check their barbarous ways. The sword and the bullet were mild when compared to the methods he would advocate. Above all things his soul revolted at their lack of cleanliness and decency. Once he witnessed an initiation ceremony which left him gasping in horror.

When the crossbeams were put in place on the fateful house he tried to escape, only to be caught as he stumbled heavily in the darkness between the huts. He incurred no punishment for this offence except that Kassui spat at him and the women laughed him to scorn. At last, however, when the singing workers began to thatch the hut and the women were collecting fruit and food for the coming feast, Conroy roused himself from his dejected torpor. He would not be killed like a scared rabbit, he told himself, he would make one last dash for freedom.

"I can't die like this," he repeated again and again as he lay in the dark and listened to the heavy breathing of his jailer.

Late at night he became hysterical and sobbed in great gulps. The native stirred restlessly in his sleep, and Conroy trembling, edged toward the dimly outlined doorway. His groping hand found the Tiuka's club and his fingers closed around the smooth handle.

Crouching on his knees he raised the weapon above his head. But he had no control over his muscles now. His arms refused to act. He was shaking with terror.

"I can't do it," he whimpered. "I can't do it. Oh, God, the last of my manhood has gone. The very last of my manhood."

Tears streamed down his dirty cheeks as he looked at the dark body barring his way.

Still murmuring, "The last of my manhood," he suddenly stiffened and brought the club down on the sleeper's head.

Somehow he crept out of the village and up through the bush. As the dawn broke he reached the crest and paused for breath. He was torn and bleeding and still sobbed as he lashed the low bushes about him with the blood-stained club.

Away below him he heard faint cries which reached him softened and mellowed through the still morning air. The man-hunt had begun. The clamor increased in volume. He caught sight of a dark body leaping from rock to rock. They were after him already.

And ahead lay the sea, placid and blue and still. He stumbled forward and began to toil down the hillside, falling and rolling among the rocks, crying aloud for help.

McLAIRD sat with his feet cocked up on the window-sill reading a month-old copy of the Sydney *Bulletin*. The cigaret between his lips glowed at regular intervals and unhurried puffs of blue smoke emerged from his nostrils, curling slowly up into the hot, still air.

Behind him at the table sat two heated gentlemen in faultless white clothes who glared at the back of his bald head and fidgeted uncomfortably.

"This is ridiculous!" one of them declared. "Mr. Shelburn and I demand your attention. Be kind enough to listen to me."

"Mr. Thorpe is quite right," assented his companion. "You cannot refuse to answer our questions."

'Well," drawled McLaird, "it's this way. You two have been here for a week telling me about Conroy and how much money you lose if he dies. I've been thinking about him, too, and what an almighty beating up he'll get if I ever meet him."

"Now, now," admonished Mr. Shelburn, "No threats, please. The whole affair looks bad enough as it is."

"So you've said a good many times," pointed out McLaird. "Conroy disappears. I'm found with a dislocated collar-bone and a bruised head, so I must have murdered him. That's the idea, isn't it?"

"I'm no lawyer," answered Mr. Shelburn, "but on the face of it——"

"Rot," snapped McLaird. "You're as crazy as that nut Conroy. Just hang about here for a few hours until the *gendarme* turns up and he will give you all the latest news. This business pleases him an awful lot, I should imagine; having to run around after a wild Australian when he could be writing nice reports or nursing his goats. D'you know, he lets a whole bunch of 'em stray into my fattening paddocks! Graft, that's what it is. But he's not a bad lad."

Mr. Thorpe helped himself to warm brandy and set the bottle down on the table with a crash.

"I am not concerned with your absurd troubles," he exclaimed angrily. "Mr. Conroy is urgently needed to complete the plans for the Australasian Livestock Corporation. He must be found if he's alive. We are losing hundreds of thousands through this delay."

'I've heard that before," McLaird gently reminded him. "My people in Melbourne told me to give you every assistance. I've tried to. I've been doing nothing else ever since I got out of bed. And I want friend Conroy just as much as you do. Now leave me alone until the *gendarme* gets here.

"But—" began Mr. Shelburn.

McLaird turned and leveled his disconcerting blue eyes at the speaker.

"Keep quiet," he ordered, and Mr. Shelburn sat back limply with a dismayed look on his face.

The *gendarme* arrived in the middle of the afternoon, tired and disgusted, but he had some information.

He had been up to the most remote Vohlu village, which he had found burnt to the ground. He had not been told about it earlier because the tribesmen wanted to hit back at their enemies. The attackers were little-known people living beyond the precipitous slopes of Mount Ndoki. They had captured Conroy and taken him away alive, so a survivor had told him.

"This man should be put in prison if he still lives," grumbled the officer. "No permit did he have from me! No permission to visit these people. He should do twelve months in Nouméa."

"*Oui, oui*," assented McLaird. Then he translated the conversation for the benefit of his guests.

"An expedition—" suggested Mr. Shelburn.

"And I shall have to ask for a squad of soldiers," went on the *gendarme*. "It will ruin my district's reputation. If I catch this imbecile it will go hard with him."

Here McLaird took command of the situation.

"I'm going up-country tomorrow hunting for strayed cows. I'll have a look around for Conroy while I'm about it," he told the official, and that worthy nodded his head vigorously.

If his friend, Monsieur McLaird, was fit

enough to undertake such a journey, well then, he would accompany him. Perhaps they could locate this *crapule* without outside help.

"He's probably dead," sighed McLaird. "but we'll find out something definite. I'd have gone before, but I couldn't move, my shoulder was too bad."

The *gendarme* was delighted; here was a chance of maintaining his district's good standing. On the morrow then, at five o'clock, he would call for McLaird. Together they would scour the country. He saluted and withdrew before either of Conroy's friends understood quite what was happening. When matters were explained to them, however, they grew frantic, demanding punitive expeditions, reprisals and detectives.

"I protest against such methods!" cried Shelburn. "I want to register a most emphatic protest. The proper authorities, the competent authorities, should deal at once with this matter."

"It will take another three weeks before any outside help can reach Nakitalo," answered McLaird. "Conroy was probably killed the very day they caught him. It's a certainty he won't be alive in another month. This is about our last chance, and it's a mighty poor one."

"Then I insist that we accompany you on this expedition," said Thorpe. "I want to get to the bottom of this affair."

"You want to come along?" grinned McLaird. "That's fine. It will do you good. I'll order a couple of horses for you at once."

NEITHER Thorpe nor Shelburn would have undertaken the next day's journey had they realized the dangers they were called upon to face. At first they were rather pleased with the novelty of the ride. Ahead in single file along the shaded track all bordered with palms and pines and silver-barked niaouli trees, went four native stockmen bareback on lean Australian cattle ponies, then came Shelburn on a high-stepping dun-colored mare and Thorpe fumbling at the bit of a rangy seventeen-hand horse with a wicked underlip. Behind rode McLaird and the *gendarme* wrangling as usual about the latter's pasture rights.

"This," quoth Shelburn as they wound along following the river bed, "is entrancingly tropical. The color of those hills—splendid!"

He waved a well-kept hand at the tumbled mountains turned to gold by the rising sun.

"Quite," answered Thorpe looking at his horse's ears which had a nasty habit of lying flat back against his head as no good horse's should.

After lunch they reached the foot-hills and left the narrowing valley for a path which carried them up, straight up, until Shelburn, looking downward, called back—

"I say, Thorpe, this *is* trick riding!"

Thorpe's answer was brief and incisive, but he kept his eyes straight ahead of him and held his reins bunched in his left hand, for his horse exhibited a growing fondness for grisly *pas-seuls* neatly performed on crumbling ledges overhanging dangerous heights.

The next day when they attacked the real mountains the track grew worse.

"Like riding over waves in a high sea," thought Thorpe, sawing at his horse's now bleeding mouth.

At last they reached the charred and deserted ruins of the Vohlu village and camped among the wind-blown ashes.

"Tomorrow," said McLaird when they had dined off corned beef and stale bread, "we'll push along across that crest."

He pointed to the frowning height just ahead of them.

"The *gendarme* thinks the raiders came down that way. There's said to be a big tribe in the next valley, but nobody knows much about them."

"Are we in sufficient numbers?" asked Thorpe. "We might meet with opposition."

"If we do, just keep out of the way," answered McLaird. "We don't want any more deaths in the family."

When they went forward the following morning there was no track to follow. On foot, leading their horses, they clambered up through dense undergrowth and around boulders. Shelburn's white riding-breeches ripped open at the knee, and he left a perfectly good leather legging hanging in some particularly thorny bushes. Thorpe who had come to fear his horse jerked savagely at the bit when he found himself being left behind. His steed, flattening back his ears,

began to practise an intricate jig on what seemed to be the world's overhanging cornice.

The others at last reached a rocky plateau, half-way up the mountain-side and rode slowly forward beneath the pitiless sun, and Thorpe cursed with a fluency and directness which would have astonished his more fortunate colleagues of the Australian Livestock Corporation. Sweating, panting and infuriated he reached level ground and swung into the saddle after his horse had danced and circled around for several minutes. In his exasperation he did a very rash thing—he used both his long, nickel-plated, heavily roweled spurs, and his horse bolted headlong at right angles to the party, taking boulders and bushes in his sudden mad rush.

By some miraculous intervention which had nothing to do with good horsemanship Thorpe kept his seat and his wild cries reached McLaird just before he was carried out of sight behind a high clump of bushes. The party wheeled and followed as best they could while Shelburn, closing the cavalcade at a dignified trot, kept crying:

"Stop him! Oh, stop him!"

THE Tiukas recaptured Conroy without trouble. They found him sprawling and exhausted at the foot of a giant pine. In fact, at the moment, he was past caring what his fate might be. He wanted to lie flat on the ground and sleep and rest. So they bound and trussed him hand and foot, offered a prayer to the spirits of the giant pine for having arrested the captive's flight, and squatted down in the shade for a while before bearing such a weight back across the hills.

"Why not finish him here?" suggested a young warrior who had only killed his first man in the raid on the Vohlus and had but scant respect for traditions.

"*Kah!* Be still," grunted one of his companions. "He must be alive and whole for the sacrifice; strong and healthy, otherwise his soul would be weak and useless."

"And I say it is better to kill while the blood is hot," retorted the young man. "That is indeed a sacrifice, but if Kassui wants this fat man——"

He arose and stood looking out toward the distant sea, thinking of the wives he would have now that he had reached man's estate.

Suddenly there came a thunder of hoofs and cries.

"Look," he yelled, "they come to his rescue!"

And all at once they saw, heading straight at them, a group of charging horsemen, led by a demon who yelled with a wide open mouth.

The young warrior paused to hurl a spear, a bullet caught him neatly in the chest as he lunged forward, and he went in state to the land of his fathers, dying with honor in the heat of battle. But his companions who knew the ways of white men fled, fled and were engulfed beneath the thick undergrowth on the hillside.

The hurtling spear struck Thorpe's horse full in the neck. It halted, reared and crashed to the ground throwing its rider into a tangle of low shrubs. McLaird, with a smoking revolver in his hand, helped him to his feet.

"What a horse," spluttered Thorpe. "A devil!"

"Well, you've got a long walk ahead of you," answered McLaird. "But what about this black boy?"

"*Gendarme*," he added as the latter rode up, "what do you make of those people?"

"Tiukas," replied the officer very much out of breath. "Many of them. It is strange. Let us go and see."

They found Conroy shortly afterwards, quite naked, very pink of body and very red of face, lying on his back on a bed of pine-needles.

Somebody gasped with astonishment, somebody chuckled, somebody else murmured—

"My lord, what a beau-tiful baby!" and they broke down and roared and laughed until tears streamed from their eyes. When a pause came Shelburn cackled:

"He's so *pink!* The dear boy!" and they laughed again until they grew weak and sore.

Then they cut his thongs and listened to his opinions of mankind while they gulped and wiped their eyes.

There is little more to tell. Along George Street, Sydney, where the financiers hold court, Conroy is called "the pink baby," but not to his face, and he is apt to resent any references to his tour of inspection of the Pacific islands, which began and ended in New Caledonia. He takes no interest

in people of ruder culture and has given away his two books on native customs.

Moreover, he has not bought up the Nakitalo Station, where McLaird still lives and raises fat bullocks what time he argues with his friend the *gendarme* about goats.

THE PATROL

IT WAS a day of peace and quiet, of beautiful sunshine and intense heat, wherefore the crew of Number One Piece shot craps in the shade of the gun-shield for matches, cigarets and their next month's pay. They were not allowed to leave their gun, "per order," and they had been fighting the war in the same manner for a week. That is to say, they rolled bones all day and slept until one o'clock each morning, when they would all awake, answer, "Here," and go back to sleep again. Number Four Piece, which was off in the woods somewhere, did all the shooting for the battery, about ten rounds a night.

The gunner, having made three passes, lighted one of his winnings and allowed that it was a great war.

"I will bet you," said he, "my second mess-kit of slum, that there are no Jerries on the other side of the Marne, nor anywhere else in this sector. Here have we sat and worn out our uniforms at the seat for some seven or eight days, and there is a pile of tin cans back of the kitchen that you can see in Berlin, and not a —— shot have we heard, and not so much as seen a balloon. No wonder this war has gone on for four years."

Now there was one within hearing who was shining the eye-pieces of his gas-mask and cleaning a pistol and burning the end of a piece of cork, and he looked up at this.

"Look you, now, Sheehan, for the Connemara bog-trotter that you are. I will bet you a bottle of vin rooge, which I gave a Frog my slicker for this very morning, against your syrup ration for the week, that there are Huns across that river, and that I will bring one back for you to send home to your girl, more by token that the old man has detailed me to go patrol this very night with a wild crazy looey from the doughboys, a curse on him and all his, and I must go and prowl about in the wheat with no hat on. Moreover and beyond, I must blacken my face with this cork, so that when I am dead no man will know me, and I shall fill an unknown grave to the glory of some mail-order officer."

With that he applied himself to the cork once more.

"You observers," said Sheehan, "lead a hard life, what with your meals brought to you and every two nights in bed all night and no rocket-guard to stand, and I will bet you my allowance of Karo for the week, and if we have none then I will get a bottle

of white mule for my extra pair of shoes and bet that. But I am not very like to lose."

NOW when it began to grow dark the observer gathered his pistol and a short and husky knife to him and walked out through the wheat field and along a path to the road. There was a sign here that said GAS ALERT, and the observer knew that it was just four hundred yards from that sign to the machine-guns that guarded the batteries' flank, which was the reason for the sign's being. So then he went on up the road and passed a cross-roads where the signs said Brownsville and Dragon Fly and Home Run, they being the names of regimental or battalion headquarters that were in that direction.

The observer looked off at the German lines that were across the river and wondered whether any one was watching him and thought that the sunset was gorgeous and that the valley of the Marne was quite the most beautiful place that he had ever seen. He went on down a road bordered by elms, ancient and immemorial, down into a little town where every house had blanketed windows, and after following a line of arrows went down into a cellar and reported to the officer that he found there.

This one turned him over to a sergeant, who led him by a nice trench back of some houses and through some gardens to a place just under the railroad track, where he found some seven men, hatless, and each with his face blackened and a look of disquiet upon it, like a child seeing the castor-oil appear, or a man on horseback who is not quite sure of his seat.

"I suppose," said the observer, seeing no sign of any shoulder-bars, "that the officer is still eating his supper. Perhaps the steak was done a trifle too much, or the potatoes cold. So shall we sit here and wait, and the American Army suspend operations until Sears Roebuck has smoked his cigar."

"We are waiting until it is dark," said a voice that seemed to come across miles of snowy fields and glittering ice, and the observer looked and saw that he who spoke had on a heavy gold ring of peculiar design, and then he knew that there was the officer, and that he was a real one, and that it was like to be a wild night.

"Now that the artillery is here, give ear to our plan," said the icy voice. "We are directed to cross this river and to bring back a prisoner if we have to go to Germany to get him. Now we will cross in a boat which has been provided and go straightway up the bank in single file. I will be in the lead, and each man shall hold the ankle of the man in front of him. As we crawl along, should I kick twice, the signal will be passed along the line, and we will all execute right into line, each man with his bombs in his hand, and when I say, 'Now!' then let each rush forward. For the rest, let every man do as the man in front of him does. Any questions?"

"I have no bombs," said the observer.

"It will be your duty," said the officer, "to locate machine-gun nests, strong points and trenches, by the system of Cartesian coordinates, and not to be throwing high explosives around with an unpractised hand. This is once when the artillery will not shoot up its own troops."

When it was dark the patrol crept over the railroad track and down through the wheat to the river's edge. It was damp and cold, and the observer was stricken with chills, and his teeth chattered, and his body shook like a leaf. When they were getting into the boat, he nearly capsized it, and had he done so, they were all dead, for the other bank was German and was but ten feet away.

They lay under the shelter of the bank for some time, and then up and across a narrow path into the wheat, the artillery man clinging for his life to a thick ankle. Now this ankle belonged to a large, rough man, by name "Gopher," a Tar Heel, and he was a good man to cling to.

So they went on, and ever and anon stopped to listen, and loud was the pounding of their hearts. The wind whistled through the wheat, and the observer wondered how they would ever get back across the river, and the tears ran down the bridge of his nose and tickled it so that he was hard put to keep from sneezing.

Now some one with few brains and much curiosity found a rocket on the American side and touched it off, to see what would happen. At once every man with a Very pistol discharged it so that the bank on both sides of the river was as bright as day.

The patrol lay without breathing but cursing inwardly, for they knew that they must have worked either east or west and were in front of troops that had not been warned that there was a patrol out, and by

the fact that the lights were almost over them they knew they were not far from the bank for all their crawling.

Moreover, the Americans were having a merry time with their machine-guns, and although the bullets were all going high, still it was not pleasant to hear the pounding and see the wheat falling and dropping around one's ears.

It came like a thunderbolt. Gopher kicked the observer suddenly in the face, and he rushed forward without further parley, falling headlong into a shell-hole. There was a startled grunt, and he saw some one running off trailing a blanket. Out pistol and a bullet away to the moon, the lieutenant kicking him vigorously and cursing him to a fare-you-well, and a free fight going on under his nose. The light went out, and darkness came that you could taste. Much straining and cursing, then a thud, and silence. Two husky whispers proclaimed—

"I've got one of the illegitimates."

Startled mutterings, and—

"Why, I thought you was one of them," from two throats at once.

"Hot dog!" said a voice. "You got teeth on you like a shark."

"Oh, blessed day," said the lieutenant, "that ever I joined the Army! What an aggregation of wooden heads and tipsy soldiers! You naughty, naughty boys, not to know enough to be able to tell one another apart from the enemy, for the double-cross, compound, triple-expansion, nameless, brainless descendants of horrible ancestry that you are. Blight me and strike me all colors of the rimrocked rainbow if I ever saw anything like it before. And 'Wild West Artillery' here, shooting off his pistol right in front of the whole German Army. By this and by that, you ought to write the Kaiser a letter that you are going to call. Now look at that—" as a rocket curved up behind them, green and blue— "Fritz will reap and sow and harrow this field with artillery and machine-gun until the prince of all evil himself wouldn't have it. And after all this commotion, which was as much as would be made by a division with trains, Y. M. C. A. and all, we have got no prisoner and are like to be made some ourselves."

"Not so," said Gopher, "for we have one, on whose head I now sit, and I know that he is a German, for I can smell him."

Now this prisoner was for the moment quite still, as Gopher had felt him wiggle and had wound the barrel of his pistol about the German's head just over the ears. In his limp state, then, he was confided to the care of Gopher and another man, called the "Squarehead," because no one knew his real name, the patrol coming from all over the regiment.

"If I find, upon returning home, that you have lost my prisoner, then shall you come softly back and get another one, and no mistake. Now, let us begone from this shell-hole."

SO THEN they started the return, crawling single file as before, with Gopher and the Squarehead in the middle with the prisoner and the rest with their hearts in their throats. There was no artillery fire and few lights, which meant that the enemy had out patrols looking for them, and their hearts sank in consequence.

It was growing colder as the night advanced, and the way back to the river seemed overlong. They had been crawling since the world began, thought the artilleryman, and then he tried to think how long it had taken them to come from the river, and it seemed to him that they were somewhat overlong on the homeward way.

The wheat stopped. They were on the edge of a road. Two cautious kicks, and the patrol rushed to the front. At once they were all among flower pots and crashing glass, lights going up everywhere, machine-guns pounding, men rising up under foot, a dark shape jabbing at the artilleryman with a bayonet, a house with windows that leered in the ghastly light from the flares, the lightning thought that the patrol was lost and that it had crawled into Chartreves or Jaulgonne.

The observer fled headlong into the wheat. For the infantry the task of fighting hand to hand with angry Huns. Two jumps, and he swan-dived in gorgeous style into a shell-hole, among a number of soft things.

"You ——!" said a soft whisper, and the artilleryman's wind was at once shut off with a hand of steel, the while something hard was slammed against his ribs.

"Let him up," quoth another voice, "it is one of our guys."

The three men dismounted from the fourth one's head, leaving him to gasp and choke as best he might.

"Now," said one, resuming a conversation

that had been interrupted, "get gone, and see that you lose not my prisoner. Give me a gun and a couple of eggs, and I will see if I can not hold Jerry in play a while."

Now all this time there was great thrashing-about in the wheat and much muttering in an unknown tongue, so that it appeared that the patrol would have scant chance to get back to the river. Howbeit, they eased out by inches, the observer, the Squarehead and Gopher going first with the precious prisoner, who was still in the land of Nod, and the lieutenant bringing up the rear.

A long hiss, and a faint plop. The patrol hugged the ground until the light would die out. Six inches from the observer's face was a German, looking at him with slack jaw and goggling eyes. Both recoiled with speed, a cry, a tearing grunt.

"Run like ——!" and the artilleryman sped toward the river, toward the American lines, and toward Spain and the African coast.

Had his wind lasted, he would have been on the edge of the Sahara by daybreak. The flare still burned. The officer was standing up and was taking them as they came, until both guns were empty. So died a very gallant gentleman.

So long as one has his face toward the enemy, terror keeps at a distance. Let him once turn, let him feel that safety lies before and that a bloodthirsty foe presses on his heels, that all is lost save his own neck, and a man's own fright will drive him on when all danger of the enemy has long since ceased.

The artilleryman ran at the top of his speed. He fell into shell-holes and scrambled out of them. His breath came in sobs. He threw away his pistol, belt and gas-mask. He wept. He cared not the slightest whether he was seen or not. He took no heed to the fact that all this banging and yelling would arouse the whole sector, and that the Americans would gaily shoot up that wheat field until a mouse was not safe in it. So the Providence that watches over fools brought him safely to the river again.

There was a little path along the river, where aforetime youths and maidens were wont to walk of an evening. The observer lay on his stomach on the far side of the path, trying to regain some of his wind and to quiet the roaring in his ears. The pounding of his heart shook him like a leaf. If he tried to cross the path and swim the river, most likely the Americans would lay down a rain of steel and throw bombs and have a most delightful time killing him.

If he called out that he was a friend, Jerry would make a colander out of him from the near side of the bank. While he debated with himself he heard a stealthy creeping along the path, and when he was like to die from fear and horror he heard words and at once knew that the creepers were Americans, for they were both cursing a third to their heart's content. There is no more heart-breaking thing than to have to swear at some one in whispers.

Gopher it was, and the Squarehead, and the prisoner, who still slept.

"He began to take on and squeak a while back," said Gopher, "but I hung one on his chin, and he has held his peace the while we dragged him around in the weeds by the slack of his neck."

It seemed that Gopher knew where there was a machine-gun whose crew knew him, and it was his mind to crawl along until they were opposite and then hurl his gas-mask, which had his name on it, across the river, leaving the little book on which one was supposed to write each time he used the mask, hanging outside. On the book he would write—

"Throw us a rope, and shoot like —— when you want us to come over."

This then was done. The note was written as best it could be in the dark and the three started down-river, dragging the Jerry with them. They stayed in the wheat, but not so far in as to get themselves lost, and well it was that they did, for they passed several dark, humpy things that they knew were machine-guns, with their crews lying alongside in a hole.

Anon they paused, and Gopher crept down to the edge of the bank and gave a mighty heave to his gas-mask. They heard it land.

Shortly thereafter a length of rope whistled through the air.

A flare went up at this, and much banging ensued. It died down, only to have the whole American line leap into a long, continuous pounding.

"Let's go!" and they were in the water and scrambling through the reeds on the other side.

Eager hands dragged them under a little foot bridge. Others pulled right lustily

on the rope which Gopher had tied around the prisoner and brought him over, a little damp but not spoiled. A group of officers arrived, bringing a doctor. Excitement, hurried whispering, cigarets, hand-shaking, clapping on the back, feeling of great pride by the patrol, visions of the D. S. C.

"When," said the doctor, who was kneeling over the prisoner, "was this man shot?"

"He was not shot," said Gopher. "I smote him as to the jaw."

"Not so," said the medico, and he pointed to the blouse which he had taken off, all soaked with blood, and then to a small hole just over the prisoner's collar-bone.

"It is in my mind that this Hun was shot earlier in the evening and laid aside to cool, for his wound has been dressed by unskilful hands. Now whether that long ridge-running Tar Heel really heard him squeak or thought he did is not material, for it is very certain that he has been plugged through the lungs, and has been dead some time, for he is quite cold."

Whereat the survivors of the patrol, being but children of a larger growth after all, wept bitterly.

THE MEN WHO WOULDN'T BE LED

***by* Wm. L. Mallabar**

CHARLIE got his in a barroom scrap
Somewhere north of the Line;
Tom was doped on the Barbary Coast;
Jack was crushed in a mine.
There isn't one of the old gang left
But me—and I'm nearly dead;
The last of the crew—the crowd I knew,
The men who wouldn't be led.

We're not so bad when you figure us out;
We played the game pretty square.
We always shared the good—and the bad,
And treated the worst of them fair.
It was just a kink in our brains, I guess,
That made us hate home and a bed;
We had to get out and travel about,
The men who wouldn't be led.

We have left our bones on the desert plains
And up on the Yukon Trail.
We have faced big odds, laughed at men and gods,
But you never saw one of us quail.
To us a flag is only a rag,
But we fought for the hand that fed;
For the Game—won or lost; no count of the cost,
The men who wouldn't be led.

Up on a trestle or down in a mine,
On the *veld*—in the hills—through the snow,
We have followed our choosings, a' will-o'-wisp fire;
All we knew was—it forced us to go.
And now I am going—that last shot was straight;
No name—"Unidentified Dead;"
Oh, the tales that we'll tell when we gather in hell—
The men who wouldn't be led.

"*The Men Who Wouldn't Be Led*," *copyright, 1922, by Wm. L. Mallabar.*

N' YAWK AND ELSWARE

by Max Bonter

Author of "The Pal with the Number Twelves," "The Commissary in the Hills," etc.

"WHAR d' *y'u* come frum?"

An uncomplimentary emphasis distinguished the use of the personal pronoun. Ed Elsware, the speaker, was a huge deep-chested man of the pioneer type whose muscles bulged conspicuously beneath his dirty khaki clothes. The queries he addressed to the newcomers were short and pointed. He was looking over their physical qualifications prior to assigning them to their jobs.

"New York," replied Bob Kingdon whose apparel, though now soiled and travel-stained, bespoke the man of culture.

"N' Yawk, hey?" commented Elsware with an unenthusiastic grunt. "I hed some N' Yawk fellers on th' job oncet or twicet, but they didn't stay long. I never yit seed one of 'em thet was willin' t' shake han's wi' hard work."

"I'll do the best I can," was the reassuring reply of Kingdon, who nevertheless had a guilty consciousness that his acquaintanceship with hard work was likewise likely to prove both short and uncongenial.

"Put this feller down fur th' rock cut," directed Elsware sourly to the camp clerk. "We'll try 'im out thar."

Kingdon and hard work soon became acquainted. High above him the jaws of a deep rock-cut opened wide toward the scorching sky. Below and about him stretched piles of blasted rock newly torn by an explosion from the face of a granite hill through which the men were cutting. Around him two-score sweating bodies strained at their toil. They broke up the huge pieces of blasted rock with heavy sledges and loaded the fragments upon dump cars preparatory to being drawn away and dumped into the "fill."

At intervals upon hearing the sharp warning, "Fire! Fire!" the workers would leap for shelter behind jutting ledges of rock while the dynamiter "bulldozed" a big boulder. This, having been split into sections by the charge, would be pounced upon by the returning workmen and smashed by the sledges into pieces small enough to handle. The hot air was filled with eternally-circling black flies, the steady clink of hand-drills biting their way slowly through hard granite and the ring of steel on steel as the husky drillmen drove home their heavy blows. Sweat was running into Kingdon's eyes; black flies were persistently lodging in his eyes and nose and ears; his soft hands were cut and blistered from handling jagged pieces of rock; his back was aching. Altogether he felt in no mood for manual toil.

"I wonder how Dante came to overlook this?" he muttered. "This must be the latest style in hells."

The New Yorker's musings were swept suddenly and rudely out of his mind, however, by the burly foreman of the rock cut who thrust a ten-pound hammer into his reluctant hands.

"N' Yawk and Elsware," copyright, 1922, by Max Bonter.

"Hi, young feller!" he bawled threateningly. "Take this sledge an' git busy!"

Kingdon shamelessly spat upon his blistered palms and began trying to wield the heavy tool. Each time the hammer struck its hard target a fresh shock was registered on his tortured spine. Whenever he would pause in his efforts and seek to straighten the kinks out of his aching back, he seemed to see the foreman's keen glance fastened ominously on him. When the gang knocked off work Kingdon walked dejectedly to the bunk-house trying to decide whether he was a hero, martyr or plain fool.

Night and repose brought a stiffening of the muscles. Morning found him scarcely more competent than a cripple. Nevertheless he went unfalteringly to the cut, picked up the heavy hammer and began a second day's torture between the grim rock walls. The minutes crawled like snails across the long day. The inexorable sun from a cloudless stronghold threw vertical mid-Summer shafts upon the toiling forms beneath, superheating the still air that was filled with black flies and rock-dust and the fumes of frequent blasts. Kingdon strove manfully to perform the unaccustomed labor; but he could not help realizing that toward him continually the suspicious gaze of the foreman was being cast. At nightfall after he had eaten his supper he was suddenly confronted by the huge bulk of the walking boss.

"N' Yawk," demanded the latter disgustedly. "Y'u hain't never worked on a railroad—hev y'u?"

"No, to tell you the truth, I haven't," was the New Yorker's ready and candid response.

"Wal," continued Elsware sarcastically, "Th' foreman tells me y'u ain't got no guts fer th' rock—termorrer y'u're a-goin' in th' sand-cut."

Morning found Kingdon shoveling sand with the sand-gang. The job, which consisted of digging through a hill and loading the sand upon dump-cars, proved to be somewhat easier than the slavery of the rock-cut. Unfortunately, however, no blasting went on in the sand cut. Consequently there were no pauses in the labor. The shoveling was continuous. Ten hours a day the routine was stoop and shovel, swat black flies, stoop and shovel. The monotony was intolerable.

"Us blokes 'as got a —— good boss, Yank," confided a fellow shoveler to Kingdon. " 'E don't s'y nothink hat all."

That this was very true the New Yorker soon discovered; but, while the foreman of the sand cut didn't "say anything," nevertheless his eyes proved to be even busier than those of the rock foreman had been. All day long he maintained an attitude of silent surveillance, literally looking down the men's collars and never even considerately walking away for a minute to give them a chance to straighten their backs.

All day Kingdon stooped and shoveled, swatted black flies, stooped and shoveled. He feared that he was beginning to contract curvature of the spine. All day long the foreman's eyes seemed to be drilling holes in his shirt collar; so he kept on stooping and swatting and shoveling. Gradually also there grew upon him an unaccountable tendency to scratch. He had heard some of the men complaining of sand-fleas in their blankets and therefore concluded that a few of these pests had wormed their way beneath his clothes. Nevertheless—to satisfy himself upon this point, which oppressed him with an increasing uneasiness—after working hours he went to a secluded spot in the forest and examined his underclothing.

"Fleas!" he muttered in amazement. "If these be fleas, where are their wings?"

Suddenly the full horror of his plight burst upon him. With a shudder he ran to the office and had his account charged with new underclothes. These he took, together with soap and towel, to a tiny lake that lay within gunshot of the camp.

"Good ——!" he groaned. "Yale alumnus, member of the exclusive Yorkville Club and—getting lousy on a railroad job!"

LIGHTNING flashed from the eyes of the big walking boss when he sought Kingdon after supper on the following day.

"Blast y'u, N' Yawk!" he bellowed. "Th' sand foreman tells me y'u're a-makin' trouble in his gang!"

"Why, Mr. Elsware——"

"Thar hain't no misters on this job, young feller! Y'u hain't in N' Yawk now!"

The New Yorker dropped formality, still attempting to explain matters.

" 'E's torkin' roight, boss," chimed in one of the shovelmen standing near. "Th'

Swede is mykin' gyme of Yank, 'ere, an' Yank 'its hout an' 'ands th' —— Swede a foiver."

Elsware glared the voluble cockney into silence.

"Y'ur pusnal affairs hain't no consarn o' mine, N' Yawk," he went on harshly. "It jist happens this foreman is a Swede hisself—thet lets y'u in bad. Furthersomore, he tells me y'u ain't got much guts fer th' sand. Now thar's jist one more job I kin give y'u to see ef thar's one —— thing y'u onderstand about buildin' a railroad. Y'u kin take out a hoss in th' mornin'. Ef y'u hain't got nuff sense t' drive a hoss——"

The walking boss glared at Kingdon with unutterable contempt and then swung abruptly on his heel and strode away.

"What does he mean by 'take out a horse'?" inquired the New Yorker curiously of the cockney.

"Stroike me pink if you 'aven't 'it it sorft, Yank!" exclaimed the shovelman enviously. "Nothink to do orl d'y but droive a —— 'orse!"

"Drive a dump car, you mean?"

"Roight, O, mytey."

"Well, to tell you the truth, cockney, I've never driven a horse in my life. I'm game to try it, though. Can't be much about it to learn. I've often seen cabbies and coachmen do it."

"Bli' me, Yank, if you haren't a funny un! Cawn't you do nothink hat all?"

"Lord, no, cockney," grinned Kingdon. "I've just come out of a blasted college."

The Londoner stared, scratching his head, almost incredulous.

"'Ow did you 'appen to come hup to this blinkin' place, Yank?"

"Got broke in Montreal. I wired the dad for money to get back, but he turned me down. Served me right. Now I've got to *earn* money to get back."

On the following morning Kingdon went early to the stable and stepped gingerly between the rows of breakfasting and stamping beasts until he located the stableman.

"Elsware told me to take out a horse," he announced briefly.

"Wal, y'u'll hev t' take ol' "Dinnymite" thar—he's th' only hoss thet ain't a-workin'.

"Dynamite!" echoed the New Yorker curiously. "What a name!"

"Thet name jist suits 'im, young feller. He's lybel t' go off any time. Y'u got t' handle 'im wi' care."

"I'll be kind to him," promised Kingdon hastily.

The stableman, choking a queer sound back into his throat, well-nigh swallowed his cud of tobacco. After Dynamite had broken his fast the harness was thrown upon his back and he was led forth. The animal proved to be coal-black excepting his eyes, which glowed with a strange red fire.

"Giddap!" commanded Kingdon firmly after the manner of the city hack drivers, at the same time gently slapping the horse's flanks with the reins. Dynamite giddaped, at the same time pulling his driver after him at headlong speed. He giddapped all the way to the rock-cut. Kingdon, with the reins wound firmly about his hands, served merely as a sort of rudder to steer the speedy beast whose broad flanks, fortunately for the man behind them, broke down or swept aside the impeding forest undergrowths.

"Well, he's obedient, anyway," gasped Kingdon, trying to regain his breath and picking the thorns and brambles out of his clothes. The fiery steed had paused at the mouth of the cut—head held proudly high and ruby eyes flashing—awaiting further orders.

"Hook y'ur hoss on t' this here kyar, young feller," directed the foreman sharply. "Then go git y'ur load."

Kingdon began maneuvering with Dynamite's steering-gear in an effort to haul his stern tackle to within hooking distance of the dump car. Dynamite's hoofs staccatoed nervously on the tow-path.

"Be keerful o' thet hoss, now," warned the foreman harshly. "He's been a-standin' in th' stable too long."

"Giddap, Dynamite," said Kingdon cautiously.

A hundred yards down the track was a crossover. This evidently did not enter into the calculations of Dynamite, whose private ideas on railroading seemed to counsel him to proceed *via* the most direct routes and ahead of schedule time.

"Hang on t' thet hoss!" yelled the foreman frantically.

That was precisely what Kingdon was doing; but his one hundred and seventy pounds' weight made little difference to Dynamite, who utterly ignored the New Yorker's frantic signals to starboard his

helm and continued his fleet course unswervingly along the tow-path. The car left the rails at the crossover and landed across the ties, bringing the plunging horse suddenly back upon his haunches.

"Y'u blasted ijit! Didn't I tell y'u t' hang on t' th' hoss?" shouted the foreman wrathfully. "Now my men's got t' lose time a-gittin' y'ur kyar back on th' rails ag'in, —— y'u!"

Kingdon's eyes flashed. A slow rage was fermenting in his bosom, but he held his peace. Half a dozen workmen straggled leisurely over to the crossover and hoisted the dump-car back upon the rails.

"Now give this feller a load," directed the foreman angrily. "Give 'im a —— big load, too—a load thet'll take some o' th' hell'ry outen thet black devil, Dinnymite!"

Dynamite's sable hide, however, harbored much more "hell'ry" than the foreman was aware of. The stout collar strained against his broad chest as he bowed his neck and tugged obediently at the burden. The heavy load of rock began to move along the rails with gradually increasing speed. The rails led directly out to the crest of the advancing wall of crushed rock that was being thrown across the neighboring valley. This crest was called the "dump." The terminating rails projected a few inches beyond the edge of the dump and across their ends was bolted a piece of heavy timber called the "bumper." The *modus operandi* was as follows.

A dump-car was driven at a moderate rate of speed to within a few yards of this bumper. The horse would then be pulled sharply about, automatically unhooking the whiffletree chain from the car. The car would then proceed at its own momentum until it struck the bumper, the force of such impact operating the mechanism that dumped the load. The horse would then be rehooked to the dumped car and the process repeated.

Dynamite was quite familiar with the details of this operation—much more so, in fact, than was his driver. Whether the powerful black had it in mind to show off his capabilities before his new attendant or whether his act was inspired by a pure love of deviltry, was a matter of individual opinion. At any rate, notwithstanding Kingdon's desperate attempts at control, the horse assumed complete charge of the proceedings. He pulled the heavily loaded car toward the dump at full speed. The dismayed New Yorker could hear the foreman's voice filling the air with shouts and curses behind him, but all the power of his arms could not swerve Dynamite from his self-willed course. Ten yards from the dump the horse turned sharply about and unhooked himself with practised ease.

The speeding car struck hard against the bumper and instantly dumped its contents. Then, with its momentum still urging it on, it turned completely over the obstacle and crashed down the side of the hill of rock in a series of somersaults until it landed bottom up in the valley a hundred feet below. Kingdon stood holding the reins with palsied hands until Dynamite, scenting his driver's confusion and helplessness, took advantage of the situation by galloping away to freedom. The whiffletree, still attached to the traces, caught against a stump and snapped in twain as the powerful beast crashed his way through the forest.

Kingdon's ruin was complete. The gang from the rock cut came running excitedly out to the dump. Curses and epithets popped from the foreman's mouth like sparks from an anvil. The New Yorker's face paled and his hands clenched as he faced the foreman's opprobrious attack.

"Even a worm will do it," he muttered.

"—— y'u! W'at y'u drivin' at?" howled the foreman, failing to understand the danger signal.

"You!"

The New Yorker struck. A moment later his persecutor was lying on his back on the tow-path. Blood was flowing from his nose. The grimy crowd of workmen stood silent, gaping at the strange man from the big city who had actually had the audacity to strike a railroad gang foreman!

Kingdon quickly left the amazed knot of laborers clustering about their fallen slave-driver. He made his way angrily back to the bunk-house. It was there, an hour later, that Elsware found him.

"Git outen th' camp, y'u ——!" bellowed the walking boss. "Thar hain't no money a-comin' t' y'u! Git back t' N' Yawk, whar th' likes o' y'u belongs! Ef we counted on fellers like y'u t' build this here railroad, we'd never git it done in a million years!"

Elsware's surly visage contracted into a glare of mingled ferocity and contempt. He towered above the New Yorker, mountainous and threatening. Kingdon knew

that even one clumsy hug from this big hulk of a man would have been almost as deadly as that of a grizzly bear, but somehow the New Yorker was not afraid.

"You great big ignoramus!" he roared desperately. "You don't know one thing in this world but rough stuff! You might be king out in these jungles, and know it all—but if I only had you in New York——"

Half an hour afterward Kingdon was striding swiftly along the trail toward the south. Between him and the end of the steel lay sixty miles of forest and granite hills and muskeg. From the end of the steel it was still seven hundred miles to New York. He hadn't so much as a cent in his pocket.

"Sent adrift into the wilderness," he muttered grimly, "because I don't know how to build a blasted railroad!"

THE drowsy aftermath of carouse was written unmistakably over this man's gigantic person. He was standing in the center of a throng—standing stock still, as if anchored to the pavement. The massive head had sagged down into the shirt collar. The great shoulders were canted sidewise like a listed ship. It seemed almost as if the giant were trying to personate the leaning tower of Pisa. The awe-struck spectators had ringed themselves in a wide circle about the unusual spectacle—wide, because they evidently feared that at any moment the tower-like legs might give way.

"Teched."

The monosyllable rumbled suddenly and sleepily out of the big man's mouth like a distant growl from a sleeping volcano. A set of massive, calloused fingers began listlessly and apparently half-consciously straying in and out of his various pockets.

"He's been robbed," came in hoarsely whispered accents of understanding from several of the bystanders.

A vigilant policeman hove in sight, drawing the legal bludgeon from its leathern scabbard. An imperative flourish of this weapon opened a lane through the fast-collecting crowd. Expectantly the onlookers looked from the center of attraction to the officer. He, however, scratched his head in pardonable perplexity. The job of salvaging such a huge derelict bade fair to be an unenviable one. Moreover, he was not exactly disturbing the peace. In fact he seemed, on the other hand, to be the injured party in some shady transaction. This officer, who liked an occasional tot himself, was loath to add to the big man's misfortunes by making him a target of legal discipline. However, he was undeniably obstructing traffic. Some sort of action therefore became immediately necessary.

"What's your name? Where do you live?" came out of the policeman in a friendly growl.

"Teched," grunted the stricken giant dismally.

The policeman repeated the query, which elicited merely a dolorous repetition of the barbarous word. A strong liquory aura invested the victim's person.

"Huh! Charged up to the neck. Don't even know your own name, eh?" summarized the Law disgustedly. "Don't anybody know who this human elephant is?"

He looked appealingly about the circle of grinning countenances—sailors, lumberjacks, trappers, railroad laborers—because Craig Street at that time was a sort of little Bowery where the rough-and-ready tribes were accustomed to disport themselves while in Montreal. It was shortly after eleven o'clock at night. Montreal's curfew for the bibulous rings at that hour. Precisely then the saloons' doors are slammed and locked, the faucets are turned off and the disciples of Bacchus, with such cargo aboard as they have been able to acquire, find themselves in the cold and uninspiring street. This was undoubtedly the reason for the tipsy big man's appearance on Craig Street. Some saloon lounger had got his money—he had subsequently been thrust into the street. Too bad. The Law sighed. He would have the job of his life to haul such a monster to the nearest call box.

Just at that moment, when the officer was about to take a grip on his hesitation and act in accordance with the letter of the law—a young man pushed his way smilingly forward.

"Sh!" he whispered. "It's Elsware, the big railroader. I know him. He's considerably under the weather, eh?"

Human nature is often a sheepy thing. The officer had never heard of Elsware, but the well-bred-looking young man's cautious implication generated the idea that here was

a "big" man of affairs whose foibles must occasionally be winked at. The policeman smiled knowingly.

"I'll take him home," volunteered the stranger. "Wait till I call a cab."

"Cab?" grinned the officer skeptically. "Why not a truck?"

Eventually, however, they stowed Elsware's ponderous frame away in a hack—the task being accomplished through the combined efforts of the Law, the affable young stranger and the hack driver. The curious crowd began disappointedly dwindling into the night. The officer, heaving a sigh of relief, sheathed his bludgeon and continued his interrupted saunter through Montreal's Tenderloin. The young stranger climbed to the box and sat beside the driver; after which the hack proceeded east through Craig Street. Elsware sat behind in solitary and maudlin majesty, his chin drooping indolently upon his breast.

"Teched," he rumbled faintly.

IN AND about the labyrinth of the great Grand Central Terminal; from lower level to upper level; from upper level back to lower level; into the subway's mouth that growled constant subterranean thunders; back through the interminable network of corridors and into the vast waiting-room—slowly, dazedly, dejectedly, a conspicuous figure of a man was making his way. He was a colossal specimen of manhood, standing easily six feet four inches in his heavy shoes. His eyes, however, held such a look of dismay as accorded ill with his formidable mold. At intervals his hands fumbled nervously in his pockets as if loath to abandon a search for something no longer there. His demeanor was so completely indicative of bewilderment that at last he was accosted by a lynx-eyed little man who had been observing him for some time.

"Pardon me, have you lost something, sir?"

The giant turned sad and anxious eyes upon the questioner.

"Reckon I hev, young feller—reckon I'm *all* lost—me an' ev'rythin' I got."

"How's that? Don't you even know where you are?"

"I dunno *nuthin* 'bout m' self. Whar am I at?"

"You're in the Grand Central Station," replied the plain-clothes man, beginning to suspect that he had located a case of amnesia.

"I knowed I wuz in a station, all right, cuz some fellers put me offen a train this mornin'," was the naive reply. "But w'at d' y'u call this here place?"

"The name of the city, you mean? Why, New York, of course."

"N' Yawk!"

The words shot out of the big fellow's mouth like the bang of a siege gun. A new terror leaped into his haggard eyes.

"How fur's it t' Muntreeyawl?" he gasped.

"Between four and five hundred miles."

Something like the last sigh of the dying Cyclops came out of the lost man's mouth.

"Who are you, and where do you come from?" persisted the detective.

"I'm frum th' North—name's Ed Elswar'—I come t' Muntreeyawl fer a couple o' days' good time. Yistiddy—leastaways I think it wuz yistiddy—I hed two hundred dollars wi' me. As fur's I kin mind w'at happened, some fellers teched me while I wuz a-tryin' t' git hum. I don't mind nuthin' arter thet till I got put offen th' train this mornin'. An' now here I be—in N' Yawk!"

The plain clothes man smiled understandingly. He had already lost interest in the case, which had turned out to be nothing more exciting than the common or Barleycorn variety of amnesia.

"I guess you'd better get the air," he said meaningly.

"Jist w'at I'm a-tryin' t' do, mister," groaned Elsware, "but durn me ef I kin git outen this tarnation place nohow!"

The sleuth laughingly piloted the big man to the main entrance and at last saw him swallowed up in the swirl of traffic on Forty-second Street.

"Some hick!" he muttered.

Elsware breasted the human billows as far as Fifth Avenue, pausing in consternation at the moving wall of vehicles that barred his further progress. The traffic policeman suddenly lifted his hand and, presto! A lane was miraculously provided through which the ponderous railroader nervously thrust his way. At Times Square he stopped in astonishment, gaping at great buildings that thrust themselves fearlessly skyward; looking in awe at the tens of thousands of people who streamed heedlessly along in six directions; trembling

at the frequent underground roarings that poured upward through the subway gratings beneath his feet. As he wandered aimlessly about the city he saw railroads in every direction. There were railroads through the thoroughfares, railroads in the air over his head and railroads under his feet.

Elsware walked along the gayest promenade in the world without receiving a sign of recognition or a glance of friendliness from a single one of all the thousands that passed him by. Curious looks there were aplenty, drawn naturally in his direction by his unusual size. But alas! He encountered never a welcoming grin or a cheery "*Bon jour!*" or a "Howdy!"

When night at last overtook him—the weird, metropolitan night with its hundreds of thousands of lights stabbing the darkness—Elsware was sitting in Herald Square listening dejectedly to the thunder of the subways, watching with awed eyes the racing "L" express trains and marveling at the never-ceasing clang and hum of the trolleys.

"Dang me," he sighed, "ef they hain't more railroads in this here N' Yawk than they is in th' hull dang Province of Queebec!"

The rugged railroad pioneer felt like an ant with a sudden conception of the universe. Out in his own wilderness he was king, but here, in this bedlam of sound and scene and motion, where they built up to the sky and down, for all he knew, to the infernal places; where all his northern importance and cocksureness seemed somehow to have been cast by the board—why, he was nothing more than a drifting hulk of a man headed irresistably for the rocks. Where would he sleep? His huge organism was already clamoring for food. How could he eat? His brain was still hazy from debauch and practical ideas for his relief offered themselves very slowly. How could he get back to the job? He hadn't even the price of a telegram to his employers so that he migh ask for a loan of money. How did men go about these things when they had neither money nor friends and were adrift in the great wilderness of New York?

Elsware groaned. At that moment a well-dressed young man, nonchalantly puffing a cigaret after the manner of his kind, seated himself upon the bench beside the despondent derelict.

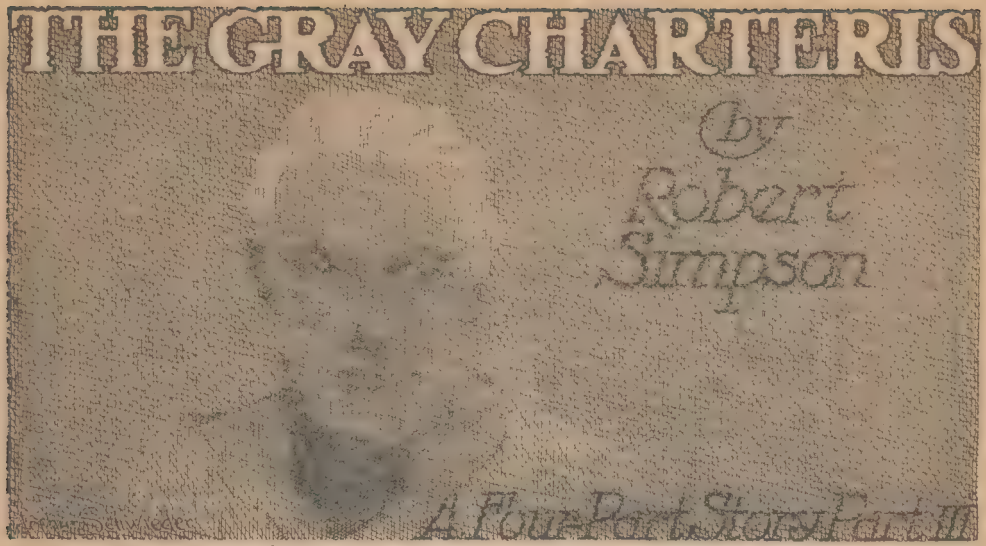
"Elsware," he said evenly, "about four months ago you chased me out of your camp—without a nickel—because I didn't know anything about building a railroad. How I ever got back to the steel is a nightmare—I don't remember half what I suffered on the way. At last, when I was nearly all in, I landed a job in the chief constructing engineer's office at the end of the steel. Saved six hundred dollars in four months. So you see, Elsware, I know something about building a railroad after all.

"I was on my way to New York when I saw you last night on Craig Street. I'll say you needed a friend. I took you away from a cop, finally got you to the station, hired a porter and the cabby to help me hoist you into the smoker, shoved a ticket into your hat-band and let you snooze. I've been tagging you around all day, enjoying myself."

"N' Yawk!" exclaimed the unfortunate railroader, with a glance of piteous appeal from his haggard eyes. "Y'u be n't a-goin, t' git even wi' me now, fer w'at I done t' y'u—be y'u, N' Yawk? Hain't I got 'nough trouble now, N' Yawk?"

Kingdon laughed, throwing away his cigaret and slapping Elsware jovially upon the shoulder.

"Why, you great big grampus, I've got nothing against you! The experience did me good. I learned lots that I never could have learned in college. But here's the idea—I want you to get the other fellow's point of view. I learned some things in your country, where men know how to build railroads and things with their hands; but now I'm going to show you around a town—and we'll put some paint on it, too—where they teach people to build railroads and things with their *heads*."



Author of "The Other Allingham," "Gilford the Gifted," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

ON THE banks of the Benin River in the Niger Delta were sprawled the buildings of Marsden & Co's. trading-factory. Across the way stood the decrepit establishment of the only rival in the vicinity, which belonged to Bart Jardine and his daughter. A distance down-stream rotted what was left of a concern once known as Grandison's, and it was to this latter beach that Charteris, a man with silvery hair and the face of a youth, came, appearing no one knew why or whence.

At the same time Hugh Morrison, owner of Marsden & Co., arrived in his yacht with his daughters and servants to look over his agency and investigate the circumstances surrounding a disturbing quarrel between two important native traders, Agwala and Abado. His visit had not lasted more than a few days when, one pitchy night, as he paced the deck of his boat, Mr. Morrison was done to death by a mysterious assailant, and immediately the neighborhood of whites and blacks was thrown into an uproar. Every effort was made to determine the murderer, and, during the proceedings of inquiry, suspicion fell upon every one from the puzzling stranger, Charteris, to Noni, Margaret Jardine's negro maid, and next Abado—who had incontinently vanished during the confusion. But even Morrison's youngest daughter, Elsie, was subjected to a grilling, and it was her nervousness and bewilderment that created a new air of suspicion and served to complicate the whole affair all the more.

THE examination continued, but little light was thrown on the situation. Gradually, however, there grew up a feeling that the gray man knew more than he cared to tell, and it increased when mysterious goings-on at Grandison's beach were reported. Word was brought that Charteris was sheltering Abado there—a fact which naturally pointed to a double implication in the recent murder.

Mr. Parker, the Government commissioner, and all those associated with Marsden & Co. concentrated their efforts toward verifying the rumor and then apprehending Abado. They solicited the help of Agwala, who was only too pleased to comply. Charteris, however, having other plans in mind, managed to keep them all guessing. Thereupon Mr. Parker decided to use force as a last resort and set about preparations for an armed visit to Grandison's.

Meanwhile the trade at Marsden & Co. commenced falling off. On the other hand, there was a sudden flurry of trade at Bart Jardine's across the way. And this phenomenon was strange enough to appear importantly connected with the already unpleasant tangle of events.

CONSIDERING how disagreeably distant and reticent he had been all day, the Great Dane astonished Catherine not a little by inveigling her into the semi-privacy of the library. Apparently he had something secret and important to say to her, and she had all the sensations of walking on tiptoe as she accepted his invitation.

"I'm afraid I've got to be unpleasant," he said when they had made themselves comfortable.

"Any more so than you have been since you arrived this morning?"

"Much."

Parker liked Catherine's "fighting face." It was good to order a woman like that around.

"You see, there isn't any valid reason why you should stay here and——"

"*The Gray Charteris*," *copyright, 1922, by Robert Simpson.*

"I'm not going! I won't go until this whole business is cleaned up!"

"Things like this take time and moping around on these rivers isn't a bit healthful."

"Fiddlesticks! If Margaret Jardine has lived on the hulk for over a year, Elsie and Fran and I can surely live on the *Bonny* for a month or two. Besides, it mustn't take that long. Why don't you *do* something instead of just looking terribly wise?"

Parker laughed.

"Then we'll have to move you down to Forcados. It's cooler down there."

"You won't do anything of the sort! You can move the yacht if you want to, but I'll go and live at Sandy MacGregors'."

"Can't do that. It's against the law."

Catherine paused, searched Parker's face for a hint of humor and found none.

"You are not really serious about this, are you?"

"Very."

"Immediately?"

"In a day or so."

"Why?"

"I think you would all be much better off at Forcados."

"You don't mean that at all," Catherine accused. "If we can stay at Forcados, we can stay here. Unless— What is it you are really afraid of?"

"Simply that Benin River is a bit upset and may become a trifle more so."

"Fighting?"

There was an eagerness in Catherine's voice that, for a Sabbath evening, was sacrilegious.

"No. I think not," Parker prevaricated guiltily.

Again Catherine hesitated, biting her lips reflectively. It was one thing to be defiant and quite another to make good her defiance.

Parker waited a minute or so, asked if he might smoke, lighted a cigaret, and then allowed a Warri policeman to scuff past one of the library doors before he spoke again.

And in the interval, Catherine's mood changed.

"I wish you would let me advise you in this," Parker began in a friendly voice, and suddenly became uncomfortably aware of Catherine's eyes.

She smiled quietly and tolerantly, and he felt somewhat foolish.

"Please don't mince matters," she said and her voice pleaded a little. "I'm not afraid of any kind of truth, provided it's true. You're just tired of us."

"No—I assure you—I have enjoyed——"

"You have not," softly. "We cramp your freedom of action—get in your way—ask stupid questions—make you say dash when you want to say, 'Damn' and all that tommyrot. You're not comfortable. And you've either made a terrible mistake in us or you're simply and bluntly fed up."

Parker rose, crunched his cigaret in an ash receiver, and Catherine had no difficulty in observing that the operation was a vicious one. She calmly retained her seat, however, and while he fumbled about for something to say, she added with a gentle note of disappointment:

"I shouldn't blame you a bit if you would say so and be done with it. But I do most heartily object to a man pretending to be considering my welfare when he's really thinking of his own."

Parker's jaws snapped and bulged, and, for a moment or two, Catherine detected the man beneath. She liked that man, partly because she was afraid of him, but greatly because he did not attempt to apologize or argue or meet the situation above a conversational level.

While she clothed her anxiety in an assumption of gentle resignation, and did not for a moment allow Parker to escape the discomfiting attention of her eyes, he said simply—

"In that case, there does not seem to be anything more to say."

"No, I suppose not. Except to decide our sailing date?"

"You can discuss that with Captain Walton."

"Yes. But when?"

"At your own discretion," he said, and Catherine admitted that his self-control was worth watching. "However, I should advise you to get under way by the first of the month."

Catherine hastily consulted the small desk calendar. The first of the month was eleven days off. Much could happen in eleven days, including the possibility that she would be able to induce the Great Dane to change his mind again.

"All right. Thanks. I'm sorry we've bothered you and—and I'll try not to ask any more questions."

"That will help," Parker said with all

the agreeable effect of a straight right between the eyes. "Please ask Malkett to come in—no, don't bother, I'll——"

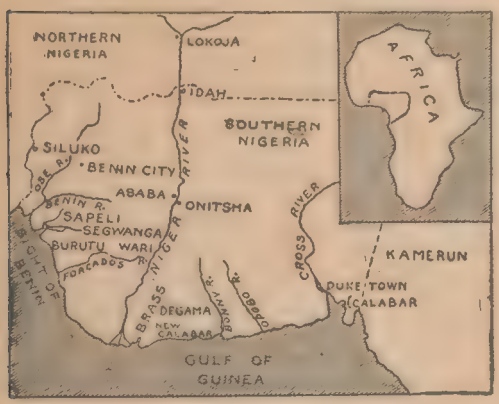
"It's all right," Catherine interposed sweetly. "I'm only too glad to help, even if it's simply as an office girl."

"Oh, ——!"

Catherine halted with her fingers on the knob of the screen door.

"Thank you," she said gratefully. "That assures me that you think I'm almost grown up." Then softly, "Good night, Commissioner."

Catherine went out leaving Parker to discolor the atmosphere in the library as savagely as he pleased, and with a doubtful smile of triumph hugging the corners of her mouth, she searched for Malkett.



Captain Walton and he had joined Hogmanay and Margaret, but Fran was standing beside the rail looking up-river. Catherine did not see her at first, but, having delivered the Great Dane's message to Malkett, she looked about, then moved across the deck.

Fran's arm now lay along the rail and her forehead rested upon it. Apparently she did not hear Catherine's step until she came very near to her, then she lifted her head sharply and spun about in startled inquiry. There was also a haunting guilt in her eyes that Catherine did not see clearly enough to enable her to detect it.

"What's up?" Fran demanded impatiently.

"Nothing," quietly. "Got a headache?"

"One of the buzzing kind," Fran returned and suddenly decided to be pleasant about it. "Bees and bees and bees. It'll be gone in the morning. What did Parker have to say to you? Ponderous words of eternal devotion, I suppose, in the guise of official business?"

"No," sourly. "We're to get out by the first."

"And he's been making sneaky goo-goo eyes at you all day!"

"Has he? I hadn't noticed. Don't you think you'd better toddle to bed?"

And Catherine took a gentle but firm hold of Fran's wrist.

"Rot!" Fran snatched her wrist out of Catherine's grasp with a sharp jerk. "You're not going to make an interesting pathological study out of me. Go over there and take MacGregor's temperature. If he had a clinical thermometer under his tongue this minute, the picture would be complete."

Catherine looked and smiled warmly. Fran laughed, and the sound struck a new note in her life, a note even Catherine did not suspect or understand. Also, Fran did not have a headache, nor, just then, was she giving a great deal of thought to her eyes.

"Are you really going to leave on the first?" she asked and seemed a little anxious.

"Not if I can help it."

"Then there's nothing to worry about," Fran declared confidently, and drew a long, silent breath of relief.

NEXT morning, Catherine received another cable from her mother, and cable-like, it did not squander words. Therefore Catherine's anxiety for the sort of action that was wholly visible and understandable increased feverishly with every hour.

She met the Great Dane's morning-after tendency to be pleasant with a saccharine humility that was somewhat thin and ragged in spots; and when Parker or Malkett were not looking, she became suddenly attentive to Arthur Garriman Bark.

Obviously Bark did not like the questions she asked. He appeared to be afraid of them, and in the evening, when Catherine told him blandly that she expected Charteris to visit the yacht "in an hour or so," Arthur's confusion became most manifest. Shortly after nine o'clock he disappeared.

In the interval, Catherine held a long and persuasive conversation with Andy Graham, the chief engineer. Andy said "No" and shook his head most of the time, but finally he nodded in a slow cautious way that did not commit him too much.

And shortly before ten o'clock Catherine announced that she was going over to Hogmanay's to talk over and have him send the reply to her mother's cable.

Oddly enough, she did not ask Fran to accompany her, and Andy Graham was in charge of the *Bonny's* launch when she reached the foot of the companion ladder.

The launch started off in the direction of Marsden & Co.'s wharf; then, about halfway, swerved sharply in the pitch black dark and shot up-river.

CHAPTER XVII

ABDUCTION

IN THE flickering light of a small kerosene lamp, Charteris squatted upon his little pile of blankets in his corner of Grandison's erstwhile office, and smoked and talked sonorously to Abado, who paced up and down in impatient restlessness, hurling an occasional staccato curse at Agwala's ancestry.

Abado's state of mind was chaotic. Not because, for the time being, he was not perfectly safe; simply that Charteris put an awkward and galling restraint upon his impulse to do rather than to wait.

In the bush round about were many eyes that watched every moment of the day and night. They belonged to Abado's sons or his hirelings and at the first hint of danger, the Sobo slithered to cover by the simple process of vanishing into the bush.

When the danger departed, he returned to the shelter of the gray man's protection, which was as complete as it was beneficent. Neither the government nor Agwala seemed at all eager to interfere with him.

Nevertheless, Abado was not happy, despite the promises Charteris was at that moment making; and when Ogulo suddenly projected himself into the room with the rather tiresome announcement — "Gov'-ment come"—Abado whined like a child whose patience with authority is on the verge of exhaustion.

"Go to back beach bush!" Charteris ordered sharply. "We go Dowadda when gov'ment go 'way."

Abado muttered under his breath, but obediently vanished like a wraith, and Ogulo followed him down the galley stairs.

Charteris did not leave his corner. Quickly dropping his mosquito curtain, and composing himself as comfortably as possible behind it, he gave every appearance of having gone off to sleep.

His position furnished him the advantage of seeing without being seen and when footsteps sounded on the stairs, he knew that Malkett or Parker, or whoever it was, had not come alone.

And then Charteris smiled a wisp-like smile that almost became a laugh.

"Anybuddy at home?" Andy Graham queried doubtfully from the doorway.

Catherine was directly behind him looking inquiringly over his shoulder, and her expression was that of one who is trying to be just politely interested in waiting for the performance to begin. She was thankful, however, that she wore skirts. Otherwise, her tell-tale knees might have told a more nervous story.

Charteris yawned audibly.

"What's that? Who's there?"

And then before any one could answer, he thrust back the mosquito curtains and looked out.

"Oh, that you Graham? And Miss Morrison!"

He scrambled to his feet, rubbing his eyes.

"I must have dozed off. This is splendid of you. A most unexpected pleasure. If I had known it was coming off, I should certainly have become possessed of a chair. May I, however, invite you to squat? Those blankets—but perhaps you would rather stand?"

Catherine laughed at the queer look of horror on Andy Graham's face.

"No, I'll squat," she decided, and promptly became enthroned in Charteris' corner. "But what are you going to do if I use up all of the blankets?"

"Squat lower and look worshipful. What's wrong, Graham? Where are you going?"

"I'll go and sit on the stairs," Andy advised, moving toward the door. "Ye'll find me there if ye want me."

Charteris looked pointedly at Catherine as Andy went out, then seated himself on the floor.

"He didn't think of that all by himself, did he?" he asked mildly.

"No—not altogether."

"Then this isn't a social call?"

"Ladies do not pay social calls after ten o'clock at night. Not even on the Benin River."

"Quite true. They don't. Er—if I may smoke, there's a tin of cigarets almost at your elbow. Will you be so good as to chuck them over to me, please? Also the matches. But be careful you don't cut yourself on that knife."

The Hausa dagger Etaji had unwillingly left behind him, was some distance from the cigarets. Catherine probably would not have noticed it if Charteris had not made known its existence.

Whether he knew this or not, or whether he was simply taking a roundabout method to put a weapon into her hand if she thought, even vaguely, that she needed the comforting assurance of a ready defense, Catherine did not know. Her color heightened just a little, however, as she "chucked" the cigarets and matches at her host. Then she picked up the knife.

"It's an ugly thing," she commented. "Horribly business like."

"It wasn't made for sharpening pencils," Charteris admitted, contentedly exhaling cigaret smoke. "You may have it as a memento of this frankly improper call. I'm sure its former owner would be glad to think it was in your possession."

"Thanks. I think I'd like to have it. Who did you take it from? Some one who tried to use it properly?"

Charteris glanced toward the door and beyond it into the fire-fly-dotted blackness toward the river. He did not seem to think that Catherine's question required an answer.

"What did you come to see me about?" he asked suddenly, but Catherine was in no wise flustered by it.

"Because I've become conviced that you know a great deal more about my father's death than you pretend to," she said with unfaltering directness.

"I?"

"Bark is afraid of you," Catherine went on steadily, "and when Agwala came to the yacht the other day he told Mr. Parker, in my presence, that you were interfering, or likely to interfere with justice."

"Great Scott!"

Catherine studied his astonishment, trying to find a flaw in it. Then, quietly, deliberately, measuring each word, she added—

"He said, in short, that you were—sheltering Abado."

Charteris threw his head back and laughed. Even his eyes joined in. Apparently the accusation was too funny for words. Then, when he found himself able to be serious again, he asked.

"Sure you are not mixing me up with some one else?"

Catherine had a sinking feeling. Even though she heard Andy Graham cough every now and then, she felt terribly alone—futile—circling about an impenetrable wall with a hair-pin for a battering-ram.

"You are the 'gray man' aren't you?" she asked, as if there might be some doubt about it.

"I'm gray enough if that constitutes identification."

"Then Agwala meant you. Also, when Bark came up here the other evening and reported you absent, I'm sure he knew you were not here or else he would not have come up."

Charteris smiled unbelievingly.

"What on earth makes you think that?"

"It isn't my thought exactly. Fran—Miss Goddard, you know—put it into my head. Said she had had an ocular demonstration of Bark's fear of you. So to-day I watched him, quizzed him, frankly bothered him about you and became convinced that Fran was right. The man actually jumped when I told him that I expected you to call this evening, and he at once left the *Bonny* for an unknown destination."

Again Charteris laughed.

"That wasn't quite fair. What, might I ask, did Parker say when Agwala accused me of throwing a monkey wrench into the law's machinery."

"Oh, he just told him he was talking rubbish, or something to that effect. But I don't altogether believe it. So I'm here."

"I see," quietly and flipping his cigaret through the open door. "Frankly, I did not expect to see you occupying that corner. I appreciate the honor keenly. Graham a trusted confidant of yours?"

Catherine's heightened color was perceptible this time. She glanced quickly down at the knife in her lap, gingerly fingered the edge of it, then put it aside with an involuntary shudder.

"I've known Andy for years. And I've never known him to betray a confidence. Dad trusted him implicitly, and Dad knew men."

Charteris nodded.

"No one other than Graham knows you are here tonight?"

Catherine looked just a little startled.

"Why do you ask that?" she questioned cautiously, and felt, for the first time, that she was farther away from the yacht than she had any right to be.

Charteris picked up the cigaret tin and the matches and rose. His movements were leisurely but deliberate.

"Then you'd better get back before any one finds it out," he said simply. "Because, of course, there is really nothing I can do for you."

Catherine stared. Her cheeks flamed. She felt like a very little girl who was being sent home because her conduct had not been good. Her eyes lighted up angrily.

"I'm not a child!" she began, not at all aware of the impulsiveness of her speech. "And I didn't go to all the bother of inducing Andy Graham to bring me up here simply to go away again without coming to some sort of understanding about your position in this terrible affair. Malkett, of the police, agrees with Mr. Parker that Agwala was talking nonsense. But I don't."

"No?"

"No, I don't. The government officials—and Sandy MacGregor, too, for that matter—know too much about this country to believe that a white man would shield a black one in a case of this sort. I don't know anything about it, so I am not allowing prejudice to interfere with my ideas about things."

"There is something in that," Charteris admitted pleasantly. "And I'm afraid I shall have to talk to Agwala in plain language for trying to ruin my spotless reputation. But, before you further imperil yours, I shall have to send you home. You're altogether too desirable to be wandering around in the dark like this."

Catherine's expression declared that she did not know whether to be angry or surprized or suspicious or all three at once. So she compromised by laughing softly and rising lightly to her feet.

"That's just make believe," she decided. "You want to get rid of me and are trying to scare me off. I didn't come here alone."

"No. But there is a back door as well as a front door to this establishment."

Catherine paused. The stillness that gripped the place had a smothering effect. There was a queer hint of stifled laughter in the air. She loitered a few steps nearer to the door.

"I wish you would be frank with me," she said simply, as though his veiled threats were not worthy of any consideration. "I have been brutally frank with you because I think you can help me to—to discover the man who did it. And I won't leave the country till I do. I had another cable from mother this morning, too."

"What does Miss Goddard think about it?"

"Fran? Oh, she—" Catherine stopped. "Why is that important? You know perfectly well you irritate her simply because she can't hurt you."

Charteris glanced along the veranda to where the shadowy outline of Andy Graham was wrapped in a furious cloud of pipe smoke. Then he moved out of the doorway into the room again, giving Catherine an opportunity to run if she wanted to.

"You forgot the knife. Shall I get it for you, or would you prefer to get it yourself?"

Nothing could have been plainer to Catherine than that. The way to the door was clear, and he gave her permission to possess herself of the ugly Hausa dagger to make sure that the way remained clear. Her color drifted and her mouth became a severe line. There was something of Hugh Morrison in her face then.

She walked suddenly toward Charteris and there was not the slightest sign of fear in her eyes. When she halted he could have touched her with his outstretched hand.

"I've come up here because I believed—and still believe—that you really know more about the inner workings of native intrigue than Malkett and MacGregor and Parker and all the rest of them put together."

"Thank you."

"And I thought you would be man enough to help a white woman when she needed help very badly. You see, I don't believe in playing with words or facts, nor have I any intention of getting down on my knees."

"No. Don't do that."

"And I'm not going to be frightened or driven out of the river one minute sooner than I want to go."

"I hope not. I like to see the *Bonny* lying out in midstream when the sun comes up. Reminds me of lots of things—including cream puffs and white icing cakes."

His hands reached out quickly and caught Catherine's wrists. She gasped, drew back a step, stopped because she had to—but did not scream. Charteris knew she was trembling, but her eyes did not show it.

The sound of Andy Graham coughing had no effect upon the situation except to relieve the outer darkness a trifle. A moment later it was blacker and more silent than ever. Catherine asked with just the suggestion of a sneer—

"This is my cue to yell, I suppose?"

"Not unless you want to. Frankly, I don't believe you do want to."

His hands slipped up her arms to her elbows and Catherine pulled her head back sharply.

"Don't! This is just cheap dramatics. Or more trifling. Please let me go."

Charteris' shoulders ceased to lean against the wall. He drew her a little nearer.

"You know, there's a whole lot to be said in favor of taking advantage of one's opportunities. And if you refuse to use the voice the Lord gave you, what's a mere man to think? You aren't even restless!"

Catherine tried to draw away from him.

"Rubbish!" she exclaimed disparagingly, but her voice sounded weak and unconvincing. "This is all bosh! Please let me go. *Don't!*"

Charteris' hands had reached her shoulders in a twinkling and she found, in another moment, that she was being held very firmly in his arms, his face a scant few inches above her own. Yet she did not scream. She was, in point of fact, afraid and ashamed to admit to Andy Graham that her secret adventure had been a mistake.

"You're hurting me," she said quietly, trying with all her might not to look frightened while she shrank from the queer, cold laughing blue of his eyes.

"I'm sorry," softly. "But I understand that even the nicest ladies like to be knocked about a bit. In fact, I think they prefer to be carted off bodily."

His left hand curled about her neck and slipped over her mouth without a second's warning, stifling her involuntary cry of fear so that it was nothing more than a choking gurgle in her throat.

Before she fully realized that it was possible that such a thing could happen to her, Charteris was half way down the rickety galley stairs and she was being "carted off bodily" as if she were no more trouble than an infant.

The arms that held her captive were sure and strong and without mercy. The hand that was clapped across her mouth was by no means gentle. She could not use even her teeth to bite her voice's way to freedom.

So that the experience hurt as well as outraged, and, going down the galley stairs, Catherine had a moment or two in which to realize her predicament, because it was dangerous to struggle then.

At the foot, however, she leaped in Charteris' arms like a wild thing; leaped and kicked and tried to tear her head out of the clamping grip of his left hand. The result was simply a tightening of that grip—a crushing sense of helplessness—a groping in the dark of unbelief as she gathered herself together for another strenuous bid for freedom.

She could not see very well where they were going, but presently she heard Charteris say softly:

"This is really exciting. Wonder what poor old Graham will say when he finds it out. Hope he doesn't take it too much to heart and shoot himself or something like that."

Again and more furiously this time, Catherine twisted and lunged and tried to tear his hand from her mouth. Then, she struck at him, but her blows fell short and broke their strength upon his shoulder, hurting her knuckles more than they did his shoulder-blade.

Presently, out of the storm, came Charteris' voice smoothly:

"A perfect conclusion to a wonderful evening. What a pity it isn't real!"

And then he suddenly stood her upon her feet, saw that she preserved her equilibrium, and stood off a pace blandly watching her amazement.

She was standing on the gig-wharf.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BULGE IN THE SCREEN

"I TOLD you there was a back door," Charteris said pleasantly. Then after a short and heavy pause. "Shall I call Graham, or would you prefer to make your own explanations?"

Catherine leaned against the wharf rail

in absolute silence. Her mouth hurt, her breath came hardly and she was trembling in the grip of a reaction that was almost as terrifying as the imprisonment of Charteris's arms.

Speech was beyond her, but she felt so inconsequent and so utterly foolish that nothing at all mattered very much. Had Charteris laughed at her, perhaps she would have liked it better. But he was so irritatingly pleasant and sympathetic that even the incessant hum of mosquitoes about her ears did not disturb her.

She looked down into the *Bonny's* launch that was tied up to the wharf, smothered a somewhat hysterical sob of anger that was mixed with an odd kind of disappointment, then, with a tremendous effort, her aching body straightened and she said in a voice that, though it hesitated a little for want of breath, was almost normal—

"I suppose that was your way of proving to me that it isn't wise to be too sure of anything or any one?"

"Perhaps. But I'll admit you were a violent burden. Elsie—that's your sister's name, isn't it?—would be lighter and more tractable than you, I imagine?"

Catherine swallowed once or twice and then decided to ignore his reference to Elsie.

"It was also your way of saying definitely that you won't take sides with me? That you would rather I'd go away and not bother you?"

"Good Lord, no! I'm glad you came and I hope you'll come back some evening and stay longer."

And though Catherine gave vent to an exclamation of impatient unbelief, he actually meant that. Then, in quiet warning, he added:

"Better not lean too heavily on that rail. It may collapse."

Catherine left the rail without a sound, looked down into the launch again and stepped on board, denying herself the proffer of any assistance.

"Please ask Andy to come down," she said in a low, toneless voice.

"Certainly. What shall I say to him?"

"Nothing. I'll tell my own lies."

Charteris excused himself politely, then walked up the path leaving her to her own somber reflections.

Her mouth and her throat were dry and, in a moment or two, whether she would or not, angry tears sprang into her eyes. She jabbed at them with a handkerchief, clenched her hands and bit upon her already aching lips with astonishing intensity for a woman of her accustomed poise and calm.

It was not often that Catherine Morrison had occasion to feel cheap and, in these few minutes, she did not bless the impulse that had encouraged her to trifle so carelessly with edged tools. Her anger, however, was not directed against Charteris. Repeatedly and without stint, shrinking from the shadows of canoes that whispered and crooned as they passed her by, she called herself a fool.

The night that had wrapped her in a cloak on the way up, was now pitted with eyes that peered and laughed. Not because she had come there and had been ridiculed for her pains, but because she was going away again so unimportantly and so painfully little desired.

Therefore Catherine writhed and continued to denounce herself as an impressionable idiot, who was so mentally unbalanced as to become maudlinly sentimental over a man who was little better than a tramp.

Presently Charteris appeared again, chatting most unconcernedly with Andy Graham who was obviously suspicious of the Hausa dagger Charteris carried so openly in his hand.

"You forgot this," Charteris said to Catherine, bending over to put the weapon carefully into her grasp.

"Oh—thanks," she acknowledged weakly when she realized what it was. "I—I'm sure Elsie will be glad to add it to her collection."

Later, when the silent Andy Graham had steered the *Bonny's* launch away from the little wharf and was heading thankfully down-stream, Catherine could almost have enjoyed cutting her tongue out for that final remark. It sounded so small and weak afterward.

Charteris, however, did not stop to think about it. He hurried to the bush at the back of the beach. Passing the galley stairs, he whispered to Ogulo the dwarf to go up and blow out the lamp, then went on to join Abado who was fuming impatiently at the entrance to the narrow bush path that led to the village of Dowadda.

"Wha's matter?" the Sobo complained in a disgruntled voice. "I wait long time. What gov'ment man do?"

"Shut up," Charteris ordered in an impolite whisper, and then added in belittling pidgin: "Abado talk all same mosquito. Mm — Mm — Mm — Mm — Mm — all time. Soon Agwala shut him hands—so—" Charteris brought the palms of his hands sharply together to illustrate—"and Abado shut up plenty too quick. Sof'ly, sof'ly. *Wah!*"

Without any further talk he dived into the bush path and thereafter brushed his way through the eery, bat- and moth-haunted darkness with no more concern than he would have shown in the Strand. He had evidently traveled the path often enough to be able to dispense with a lantern.

Abado followed in silence; the sulky quiet of a disciplined child. He did not understand the queer gray man's queerer methods and did not pretend to. And now that his rage against Agwala had roused him completely from his suicidal lethargy, he was beginning to think for himself and to hunger for action of his own devising.

As in the case of the murder of Morrison, that action would be subtle only in the soundlessness of its execution; simply a question of striking swiftly in the dark before his enemy had any opportunity to do likewise to him.

And, in truth, Abado was frankly out for blood. Every nerve and sinew of him cried out for the kind of vengeance that his hands could feel and his eyes could gloat over.

There was nothing fine about his vision. His mercy would be the mercy of a wounded bush cat, and if it were possible that he could see Agwala's fat body die slowly, inch by inch, or pound by pound, he would consider that all of life had been well worth the trouble just for the reward of that single evening.

The village of Dowadda did not promise anything to him. It's chief was a small oil-trader named Roku, who, from Abado's viewpoint, would sell himself to the highest bidder.

Why Charteris put faith in men whose canoes and wives were few, Abado could not understand. It would not have startled the Sobo if, in the interval since the sun had gone down, the village of Dowadda had become a death trap, bought and paid for by Agwala.

Suddenly Abado heard the light scuff of Ogulo's feet behind him, but, save for a half-turn of the head, he ignored the dwarf altogether. Keeping his eyes fixed upon the middle of the gray man's back, he plodded on in an unenthusiastic jog-trot that expressed his mental attitude more eloquently than speech.

The night voices of the bush rustled and whimpered and coughed and shrilled. And though it was not at all impossible that among the unseen, friendly shadows of near-naked men who saw them go past, there might be others who would risk their lives to serve Agwala, Charteris did not change his gait or hesitate even for a moment.

Roku, the chief of Dowadda, met them just as they emerged from the path and headed for the village. Evidently Charteris' visit had been prearranged.

Roku was a stout, but well-conditioned Jakri who had migrated from the Warri district some years before; which was one reason why Abado did not trust him. Jakri men from Warri were, in Abado's opinion, as smooth and treacherous as their women were expensive.

"Gov'ment come," Roku informed Charteris in a mumbling voice. "Mas' Malkett. He go 'way. I t'ink so be all ri'. Agwala man come talk oil palaver. Five puncheon. I laugh inside my head."

Then, taking belated notice of Abado, he said "*Doh*" as a matter of course, but otherwise exhibited neither surprize nor fear, nor any emotion save a desire to serve the gray man far beyond Agwala's proffered bribe of five puncheons of oil.

As he turned toward the village, Charteris laid the tips of his fingers retainingly on his arm.

"Wait. Agwala live Benin River all time. Little time pass, gray man go 'way. Savez?"

He kept his fingers on Roku's arm, but the Jakri did not tremble. He laughed, and his laughter was so spontaneous that even Ogulo, who hung in the background, thought the sound mocked Agwala too loudly. Then Roku said in Jakri:

"Agwala is great. He is the voice of many. But I am Roku, Chief of Dowadda. I am my own tongue and the gray man is my friend."

Abado sneered silently, and Charteris paused a moment or two.

"All right. We go," he said at last, and allowed Roku to lead the way into the small

mud-built village, which, being the home of a Jakri of Warri, was cleaner, less evil smelling and less of a hodge-podge enterprise than the majority of the villages in the Benin country.

Just then it was in complete darkness, and save for the spasmodic wailing of a wakeful infant or two, it was also sound asleep.

Roku was wholly unattended, and the stark and sprawling forms of those who chose to sleep upon mats outside their huts stirred but slightly as the little company made its cautious way to the door of Roku's mud-and-thatch establishment.

It was, of course, a larger hut than any of the others, situated at the head of a semi-circular lane that formed one half of a double circle, the compound being in the center.

They went no farther than the first room of Roku's house, however, and Ogulo, because of the curse that was upon him, did not go even as far as that. He composed himself in the dust outside the door while Roku seated his guests upon trading-beach camp chairs around a roughly made table constructed of unplaned deal boards. Roku liked to give the impression that he lived like a gentleman, white man fashion.

In the dark and silent rooms that lay beyond a screen of fiber mats, the mysteries of Roku's household, in spite of trading-beach furnishings, were as rampant as ever.

A white man might go through the rooms from the "hall of the gods" to the burial chamber and look those mysteries full in the face and be entirely unaware of their meaning and even of their presence.

Some of them would remain unsolved even at Roku's death, because if his gods were good and no ill of the flesh or spirit befell him, he would die and be buried in that house.

For such was the honor due to a chief such as he had every intention of being—with the gray man's beneficent assistance.

And to prove that he was worthy, he lighted a small kerosene lamp, dropped the mat screens over door and window, and from a hole in the mud wall that was concealed behind another colorful mat, he produced a bottle of perfectly good Scotch and another of English gin.

Glasses followed, and for the honor of Roku's house, Charteris drank two fingers of Scotch. Abado with a surly grunt took gin. Roku, himself, took a little of both and immediately, according to his own version of it, became a blood brother to the Sobo and the thumb-nail on the gray man's right hand.

Charteris smiled, glanced from one to the other of his companions, and said simply—

"Maybe so, I want eight-paddle canoe?"

Roku nodded. That was easy enough.

"I think I go Agwalla-town—now—one time."

The whites of Roku's eyes showed sharply for a second, then vanished.

"Cha!"

The exclamation was Abado's and he leaped to his feet, glaring wildly about him. Roku, having composed his features again, merely nodded gravely and did not apparently observe the big Sobo's excitement.

Charteris gave no heed to either of them. He was casually studying a nervous-appearing bulge in the fiber mat screen which separated the room from the others. This screen was divided into two equal parts, the one overlapping the other, and the bulge might have been caused by a slight breeze. It began, however, at a spot that was about the height of a man's shoulder.

"Squat!" he ordered Abado quietly, and the Sobo sat down again as if his camp chair were charged with electricity.

Then, before he had an opportunity to feel half-way comfortable, Charteris declared—

"You go back to Materri, sof'ly, sof'ly."

Again Abado stood upright expressing more amazement than before.

Materri was his own village and he knew it would be the height of folly to go there.

Roku smiled and shrugged his glistening shoulders and the bulge in the fiber mat screen shifted. Charteris leaned across the table just a little and began trifling with the bottle of Scotch.

"You fit to give him canoe?" he asked Roku, as if Abado's protests were of no consequence.

Roku admitted that he could provide Abado also with a canoe.

"All right. Two canoe, one time. We talk Doridi palaver, tomorrow time."

Roku nodded. He knew Doridi was the confidant of Agwala who had generously told Noni and Abado so much about the Morrison-Agwala interview at Forcados. No one had seen or heard much about him since that time.

When the chief of Dowadda departed to do the gray man's bidding, Abado's protests

broke out anew in a jabbering crescendo. He came and stood beside Charteris' chair in an effort to impress him with the sincerity and wisdom of his contentions.

If he went back to Materri, he argued, it would be equal to walking into the government barracks at Warri or Sapeli. The village of Materri was surely being watched night and day, both by the government and by Agwala, and Abado thought it would be more simple to cut his own throat then and there than to do anything so foolhardy as to paddle his way into Agwala's hands like that.

Charteris did not attempt to suppress him. Instead he allowed him to go on talking, and, rising from his chair, argued convincingly with him, too, all the while twining his fingers about the neck of the bottle of Scotch.

The bulge in the mat screen leaped forward suddenly.

Abado's back was toward it. One moment he felt the grip of Charteris' powerful left hand upon his arm; the next he was spinning across the room to the startling accompaniment of the crash of breaking glass, a sudden darkness that swirled and smothered and the sound of a revolver shot that made his ear-drums ring.

Then, out of the dark there came the unmistakable threshing of struggling bodies, a sharp squeal of pain that died in an uncanny grunt, and finally a low, feeble moan that chilled.

Abado, who was not unused to fights in the dark, crouched against the farthest wall and shuddered.

CHAPTER XIX

A PARTIAL EXPLANATION

OGULO was many yards from the door by that time. Roku's household was awake, rubbing its eyes. The lifeless figures who slept outside their huts were no longer lifeless, and Roku himself, down at the edge of Dowadda Creek, making ready the canoes at the gray man's bidding, turned his head sharply at the sound of the shot and promptly became the color of dirty ashes.

Muttering whispers that grew louder and louder passed up and down the village from end to end and back again. The jabbering of the women and the staccato grunting of the men, the frightened cries of many children and the bleating and stampeding of equally frightened goats and sheep, the scurrying of excited naked feet and the querulous inquiries of the very old—these demonstrations rose and fell in waves and died down again like the sucking rumble of receding waters.

Roku did not stir. Neither did he inquire. He was afraid he knew; so afraid that he cursed the white man's government and, still more fluently cursed Agwala. His dream of greatness burst like a bubble in a moment; and, if that were so, there was nothing to be gained by flight.

Abado still cowered against the wall in Roku's hut. Once, he heard a sound like the rattle of a belt buckle, but it meant nothing to him. When he finally did move, it was because he *felt* the approach of Charteris rather than saw or heard him. Why he knew it was the gray man, he could not have told, because, while there was a tumult outside, within that room there was a silence that made breathing as difficult as it seemed thunderous.

Then Charteris was at his elbow whispering in his ear.

Abado was frightened. There was no doubt about that. But that which Charteris whispered made a slow, evil grin expand from ear to ear. He obeyed the touch of the gray man's hand without so much as an instant's hesitation, drew his overcloth up over his head to conceal his face, and followed Charteris out into the welcome open, still grinning.

A gasp of astonishment and fear went up when they made their appearance. It died into a whispering awe as they proceeded to the waterfront where Roku waited. There was something unreal in the manner in which every mouth was stopped and every arm hung in listless inaction as they passed by.

Charteris ignored Roku and gave all of his attention to Abado. He saw to it that the Sobo entered the small canoe provided for him, and when Abado again whimperingly protested his return to Materri, Charteris cursed him roundly in his own jargon and told him impatiently to be off.

Like a child venturing into the dark alone, Abado paddled slowly and reluctantly up stream. So reluctantly at first, that Charteris picked up a handy piece of mangrove stick and hurled it after him with such good aim that Abado uttered a frightened cry and paddled furiously out of range.

His grin, however, was broader and more evil than ever.

Then Charteris turned to Roku and said simply:

"Come. We go."

And he led the way back to Roku's hut.

The Jakri followed quaking. He had not failed to observe that there was a revolver sticking in the gray man's belt—a revolver that had not been there before.

And he knew to whom the weapon belonged.

Fight, under the circumstances was even more useless than flight. Roku never even thought of it. His skin was still whole and he passionately wished it to remain so as long as possible.

"Bring lamp," Charteris ordered when they reached the door of the hut again. "Tell all man go sleep. No make talk. Sof'ly, sof'ly."

Roku gulped. Quaveringly he issued an order to his excited villagers to cease their chattering and resume their disturbed slumbers, then scurried nervously in search of another lamp.

His dignity, for the moment at least, was gone. He might recover it again if the gray man did not put an everlasting blight upon him. But until he was sure about this, he would feel like a paddle boy whose back was raw after a flogging.

Charteris entered the hut and went directly in the direction of the right hand corner of the first room.

Some one was wriggling like an eel in that corner and giving vent to an occasional moan of pain or fear. When Charteris told the wriggler to save his energies, quiet fell instantly.

Presently Roku returned with a lamp, placed it on the table and then looked furtively at the trussed figure of Arthur Garriman Bark. Roku seemed afraid to assimilate too much of the truth all at once.

And, unquestionably, Arthur was a pathetic spectacle. His arms were strapped behind him with his service belt, and his ankles were bound with the belt that ordinarily supported his trousers. He was dirty and disheveled and his head ached from the effect of the quieting crack Charteris had given him with the butt of the revolver.

His morale, therefore, was at a very low ebb. Charteris had the revolver, Abado had escaped and Malkett did not know he was there. Many things could happen to him long before Malkett found it out.

"Sorry I missed you when you called at Grandison's the other evening," Charteris said blandly. "Would have saved all this trouble if I hadn't. Was Malkett foolish enough to post you in there?"

Arthur did not answer. He was afraid to lie and more afraid to tell the truth, and he was not at all sure that Roku was well enough paid to go on lying indefinitely. So he kept his peace.

"Why were you so confoundedly anxious to put a bullet into Abado that you couldn't wait until I was out of the way?"

Arthur did not answer that either, but his expression at once betrayed the fact that Charteris's surmise was unfailingly correct.

"Remember what I told you on the *Bonny* the other day?"

Arthur remembered, and looked as if he would like to forget.

"And yet you took a cold-blooded pot shot like that at him." A thoughtful pause. "I suppose that was why you visited Grandison's in my absence. Thought you might spot him and do the trick without having to take so desperate a chance as this? You used to be such a nice young man, too. What is it? Agwala or women or both?"

Bark writhed. He hoped Roku did not understand much of what Charteris was saying.

"As I see it," Charteris informed him gratuitously, "you were going to take your man, as dead as you could make him, and turn him over to Malkett as a good servant of the Crown should. In other words—Come here!"

The command was addressed to Roku, who was edging toward the bottle of gin. All he wanted, however, was a drink to steady his trembling legs, but Charteris ordered him to stand against the opposite wall and await his pleasure. Then he turned to Bark again.

"In other words," he went on as if no interruption had occurred, "you were willing to take that chance with me in the room, and if a careless shot had gone wild——"

"No!" The negative was as hoarse as it was desperate. "My chief gave me orders to secure Abado, dead or alive——"

"And Agwala prefers him dead."

"I know nothing of Chief Agwala's desires."

"You were so nervous about it, too, you

could not keep your shoulder out of the picture."

Arthur looked down his nose because there was nowhere else to look with any comfort and he was visibly relieved when Charteris switched his attention to Roku, whose knees sagged the moment the gray man turned in his direction.

Outside, quiet had fallen again. Probably there were whispering speculations being indulged in within the darkened walls of every hut in Dowadda. But they were only whisperings and did not reach Roku's ears. Even Ogulo the dwarf had returned and resumed his place in the dust outside the door.

Charteris spoke in a low voice in Roku's own tongue:

"Speak truth, small snake. Whose oil paid for—this?"

He touched Bark contemptuously with the toe of his boot.

Roku looked all about him in a shivering terror, and his fear of the gray man was not merely physical. Several times he began to speak and each time the words died in his throat.

Finally, being between the devil and the deep sea—almost as fearful of Agwala's far-reaching vengeance as he was of the powers of darkness attributed to the gray man—he flung himself in the stereotyped native fashion at Charteris' feet, mumbling the equally hackneyed admission that he was a poor Jakri man whose village was small, whose wives and goats and puncheons were few and——

Charteris put his right foot down hard on the groveling neck and his left dug sharply into Roku's ribs.

"Get up!"

A squeak of pain answered him and the Jakri threw himself bodily out of reach of further punishment. He huddled on the floor about a yard away from Bark and quakingly awaited the gray man's next move.

"All right," Charteris said as if he were perfectly satisfied. "We go Agwala-town. *Wah!*"

Instantly Roku began to whine in real earnest, while Bark, staring up at Charteris in petrified unbelief, made queer sounds in his throat as if he were choking for breath. Neither of them seemed to be at all anxious to visit Agwala-town under these conditions.

"I won't go!" Arthur sputtered at last. "It's preposterous! I am a servant of His Majesty! I wear his uniform. This sort of thing may be all perfectly well for common natives, but I am an officer of the constabulary, and though I am at present—*pro tem*, that is—at a physical disadvantage, it is simply *pro tem*, and the sooner——"

Charteris went quietly to the door of the hut, saw Ogulo squatting there, and called him in.

Ogulo backed away.

"I no fit," he whimpered, knowing that because he was accursed, he would defile Roku's house if he entered it, and thereby unnecessarily incur the displeasure of the chief.

Apparently Charteris understood Ogulo's hesitation.

"The house of Roku is the house of a very small lizard," he said simply. "Smaller even than you. Come."

Ogulo obeyed this time, but gingerly. And when Roku saw Ogulo-of-the-long-arms put his foot across the threshold, he immediately set up a wail that threatened to rouse the house and the village again. He covered his head with his cloth and rocked back and forth, calling the shades of his fathers to witness that the blight that had fallen upon his house was not of his devising.

Charteris ordered him to be silent and with a gesture to the amazed Ogulo, told the dwarf to release Bark's ankles. Then sliding over to Roku, he seized him by the scruff of the neck and yanked him most ungently to his feet. He held him there voiceless and unmoving until Bark stood reluctantly upright, his arms still strapped behind him, his trousers' belt returned to its proper sphere of influence.

All the while Arthur had been protesting in more or less grandiloquent English against the indignity he was suffering; and finally, since Charteris gave no heed to his eloquence, asked thickly and hopelessly—

"You are going to take me to Agwala-town like this?"

"Exactly. Why not?"

Arthur made several attempts before he was able to say:

"Bu—bu—but you have the revolver! Isn't that security enough?"

Charteris laughed tonelessly.

"It's the moral effect I'm driving at," he explained. "You're a yellow dog, you know,

and I want to be sure you feel the part."

Bark's chin had the decency to sink lower and lower until it rested on the first button of his tunic. He had nothing more to say.

Whereupon Charteris gave Roku most explicit instructions as to his conduct on the way down to the creek side, and indicated, with a prod of Bark's revolver muzzle, what was likely to transpire, first and foremost, if there was any trouble of his making.

Then, telling Ogulo to see to it that Bark behaved properly, they filed out of the hut and started off in the direction of the waterfront.

There were eyes that saw them go past, vague whispering voices that questioned their going, but there was no demonstration of hostility. Charteris said to Roku in a low voice as they neared the creek:

"Five puncheons. You laugh inside your head. 'Member?" Charteris chuckled while the Jakri squirmed. "What's matter Agwala man no here?"

Roku's step lagged purposely.

"Agwala no savez this palaver," he mumbled. "Agwala no pay. Be Bark pay. I no savez Bark go make shoot palaver."

"I see. Bark's own idea entirely, eh?" Then dropping into pidgin again. "'Member them time you laugh when I say Agwala live on Benin River all time?"

Roku remembered that, too, as his sheepish expression indicated.

"You laughed plenty too much," Charteris informed him for his future guidance. "When Jakri man on Benin River laugh at Agwala all same Roku laugh then—he lie. He lie in his belly and in his head. Savez?"

Roku felt as if he were shrinking. His feet became like heavy weights to be dragged along the ground.

"Agwala no pay," he repeated thickly and desperately. "Be Bark pay. I no savez he go make shoot palaver."

Charteris did not dispute the point. He prodded Roku into a faster gait. Presently they arrived at the creek side, where an eight-paddle canoe, with its complement of paddle boys, awaited them, and he said to Ogulo the dwarf sharply:

"Go for my canoe. Bring it Agwala-town creek. Make plenty quick!"

Ogulo had no relish for the assignment. The farther he kept away from Agwala-town creek, the better pleased he would be. But he hesitated only a moment or two, then with an acknowledging grunt, trotted in his ungainly way toward the bush path leading to Grandison's beach.

A few minutes later, in spite of Bark's eloquent indignation and Roku's sniveling appeals to be left behind, Charteris and his "guests" were squatting under the grass awning that sheltered the small matted deck of the eight-paddle canoe.

As the sleepy paddle boys shoved off and turned the canoe's nose down stream, Charteris said to Arthur Garriman Bark pleasantly:

"I had a notion, earlier in the evening, that I might be compelled to visit your fat friend. But I didn't anticipate quite so much company."

CHAPTER XX

THE POPULARITY OF AGWALA

HOGMANAY SANDY MACGREGOR had not stuck a revolver in his belt since Chief Motu of Segwanga had made his justly famous "last stand." This had been several years before.

Consequently, the circumstance that he was oiling no less than two regulation army revolvers—his beach clerk's and his own—when he heard Catherine Morrison's step on the stairs late that evening, was more remarkable than Catherine might have thought had she been permitted to see the weapons.

They were out of sight in a drawer of MacGregor's desk when she entered his office, and Hogmanay called to her from his bedroom while he washed his hands.

"Sit right down, Catherine. I'll be with you in a minute."

"All right. Don't hurry."

MacGregor had not expected Catherine so soon and she, for her part, was calling upon him only because she had said she would before she left the yacht. She did not anticipate that Hogmanay would have anything to say to her she did not already know, and took it for granted that he had seen her come up the beach from the launch, and that he was probably struggling into a collar and tie, most of which his beard would conceal in any case.

It was apparent—or would have been to Fran Goddard, for instance—that Catherine was torn loose from the solid foundations

she had been so careful to build under her feet.

She did not sit down while she waited Hogmanay's appearance. Pacing the floor of his office, she was still acutely conscious of the pressure of Charteris' arm, and she knew it would be impossible to forget the awful, stifling feel of his hand across her mouth.

The experience had been far from playful. While it lasted, she had been entirely at Charteris' mercy, and, as is common with adventures of the sort, their real significance becomes more apparent afterward.

Catherine was just beginning to realize what had happened to her, and how simply it had happened. Later, when her perspective improved, she would understand it even better. While she was trying to bring some semblance of order out of the chaos of her uprooted emotions, Hogmanay came in.

"Ye're worried about something?" he asked at once quietly. "Who brought ye over?"

"Andy," Catherine answered shaking hands. "He's waiting in the launch. I just came over because— Oh, Malkett doesn't seem to be getting anywhere, and I had another cable from mother this morning."

"Aye. So ye would. She'll be anxious about ye. Will ye not sit down?"

Catherine accepted the chair MacGregor offered, looked out toward the lights of the *Bonny* and the farther dim lights of the hulk, then asked—

"Do you think Abado really did it?"

Hogmanay thought that over. In truth, he was far from sure about it, and having given his conversation with Charteris due consideration, the things he had learned in the past few days had been sufficiently interesting to induce him to borrow a revolver to augment his own.

"I've not decided yet," he returned cannily, as the shuffling foot of a sleepy steward scuffed its way through the dining-room galleyward. "What makes ye think he didn't?"

"I didn't say I thought that."

"No, but ye're doubtin' an apparently established fact, and that means ye're no' so sure about it. Why?"

"Oh, don't quibble!" Catherine rose so quickly and her displeasure was so evident that Hogmanay's eyebrows lifted sharply.

"I'm in no mood to bother with fine definitions. What I want is action!"

MacGregor nodded placidly.

"Aye. I don't doubt it a bit. I feel that way mysel' sometimes when I'm waitin' for other folks to do a bit o' work for me. Tell me about it."

"Tell you about what?" Catherine exploded.

"About what's makin' ye snap at me like that."

"Oh—I—I——"

"No. Don't say you're sorry. Didn't he tell you whether Abado did it or no'?"

Catherine laughed a little off key and looked quickly out toward the river again.

"He—who—what do you mean?"

"I'll admit Andy Graham makes a good chaperon," MacGregor said dryly and smiled.

Then because Catherine continued to look steadily out into the blackness toward the river, wishing it would swallow her, he added in a low, gentle voice:

"There are a lot o' things happenin' out there that you don't see. Like Malkett, some o' the rest o' us seem to be just sittin' down and waitin' for things to come off. But we're not as much asleep as ye'd think." A moment's pause. "Garland—he's my shop clerk—saw ye goin' up to Grandison's beach the night. About an hour ago."

"How——"

"He was goin' to the *Bonny* in my gig wi' a message and saw ye comin' down the companion ladder—or rather, he wasn't sure it was you, then. But the launch headed straight up-river, he told me, and—well, you're here now. So it's all right."

"He didn't have to tattle to you about it, did he?" she asked impulsively.

"Who? Garland? Ye're wrong there. Garland doesn't know ye went up to Grandison's beach. That is, he didn't say so to me. Ye see, the message I sent him with was for you. And ye weren't there. They told him you had come here and that he must have missed ye in the dark."

Catherine breathed deeply. She saw a beach watch boy standing on the main wharf gently swinging a hurricane lamp. The light danced irritatingly and she wished the boy would hold it still.

"How do you know I went to Grandison's beach?"

"Oh—I just guessed it. There's not

much else up that way, and—he's a fascinatin' man."

Catherine's mouth, still tender, tightened into a line.

"Yes. Quite. But niggardly with information." Her fine eyes suddenly met Hogmanay's without a flicker. "He refused to be in the least helpful."

"Wouldn't tell you whether Abado was up there or no'?"

"Not a thing. What was the message you sent me?"

"Hunh! He's a queer stick." Hogmanay stroked his beard thoughtfully. "I was thinkin' that maybe if you and me paid a certain fat man an informal visit, we might clear the atmosphere a bit."

"Agwala! Now? At this time of night?"

"Ye're not afraid o' the dark, are ye?"

"Afraid! Good heavens, no. Can't we take the launch? It would be ever so much quicker."

Hogmanay grinned.

"You're Hugh Morrison's bairn," he conceded, and, in his opinion, that was the highest compliment he could pay her. "And that's just what I want Agwala to get into his thick head. There's a lot o' his trade that's playin' tricks these days that are not accordin' to Hoyle."

"Tricks!"

"Just that. His trade is wanderin' about—here, there and everywhere—and we're not gettin' the half of it. Even Jardine, over there, has done nearly as much business as I have in the past two 'r three days!"

Catherine regarded Hogmanay's unusual indignation with a slight smile.

"You don't mind that very much, do you?"

"Mind! And why not?" Then observing Catherine's scepticism more closely. "Oh, ye mean Margaret?" He shook his head slowly. "That's neither here nor there. But since ye've brought up the subject, can I ask you a favor?"

"Surely."

"Will ye try to kidnap her or something and take her wi' ye when you go home?"

Catherine laughed.

"Fran suggested that this morning," she said simply. "And I hope we can persuade her to come."

"That's fine."

Hogmanay paused a moment or two, then got back to business with an abruptness that jarred. Apparently he was in no mood to let sentiment interfere with his responsibility to the firm.

"Agwala is not livin' up to the promises he made your father at Forcados," he rumbled. "When I sent for him to come up here tonight, he put me off wi' an excuse. So, I'm goin' to him."

"And where do I come in?" Catherine asked expectantly.

"Well, ye see, you're a Morrison," MacGregor answered with solemn conviction. "And Agwala knows the difference between a member o' the family and a servant. I'm just a servant. You will be something he never expected to happen. And I'll warrant, if we land in on him at this hour, he'll be a whole lot more afraid o' you than you will be of him. Are ye sure ye want to go, now?"

"Of course! I wouldn't miss it for worlds. And I'm just crazy to do something to help."

"Aye. I thought ye would be. It'll be a sort o' business meetin', with you as chairman o' the board. I'll do the talkin' and you'll nod like a judge and make him as unhappy as ye can by sayin' as little as possible. The Charteris man didn't happen to mention trade, did he?"

Catherine's smile faded with a sharpness that was startling.

"Nothing. I told him what Agwala said about the shielding of Abado, and he laughed at me."

"Um—well, ye shouldn't have told him that," MacGregor said cannily, as the back beach watch boy solemnly struck six bells on the old ship's bell that hung inside the oil yard fence. "But it's no matter. He probably knew it already. That watch boy's a bit slow. It's nearer twelve than eleven. Just a minute till I call Garland."

"Is he coming, too?"

"Aye. I'm thinkin' he'd better. He's a handy man to have about ye in a native village."

"Gracious! That sounds exciting!"

"No—just a bit o' caution in the matter of where to put your feet," Hogmanay said, halting a moment in the doorway. "Native villages are not overparticular under foot, and ye wouldn't be fit to live with if you were laid up with a sprained ankle now."

Catherine laughed. She was tingling all over in the hope that the visit to Agwala-town was not going to be as mild as Hogmanay promised. MacGregor went along

to Garland's room praying that he was not making a mistake in taking her there.

Garland was waiting for him.

"All right," the shop clerk announced. "I'm full of artillery. Can you see any of it?"

Hogmanay looked him over critically.

"Just a suspicious looking lump under your left arm. Pull it for'ard a bit and it'll be all right."

Garland's hand disappeared under his shirt and pulled the "lump" forward a little.

"Fine," Hogmanay approved. "But I'm hopin' we don't have to murder anybody. Come along and take Miss Morrison down to the launch while I get ready."

In another minute Hogmanay was explaining to Catherine that he had one or two little things to attend to and that if she would go to the launch and advise Andy Graham where they were going, he would join her in a jiffy.

Catherine accepted Garland's escort with a smile that put him immediately at his ease. The moment they were gone, Hogmanay promptly retrieved the revolvers from his desk.

He loaded them carefully, and, like Garland, slung one under each armpit inside his shirt. It was a trick he had learned from a poetic gentleman, known from Sierra Leone to Duke Town, Calabar, by the violent pseudonym of "Knife-Edge" Harrington; the gentleman, by the way, who was responsible for the aforementioned last stand of Chief Motu of Segwanga.

Hogmanay recalled the affair and the man with a reminiscent grin, then, making sure that there was nothing but the measure of his own speed to hinder the "draw", he solemnly gave instructions to a sleepy steward not to blow out the lamp, and went slowly and meditatively down stairs.

There was not the smallest danger to Catherine in the little midnight adventure. Agwala-town, under MacGregor's guidance, would be safer than West Kensington. Not because Hogmanay's mighty right arm was a source of terror; simply that he was a trader.

A uniform has frequently been a man's death warrant in the Delta; while a gray flannel shirt and a pair of oil-smeared white drills have gone blandly through many a seething caldron of rebellion.

And MacGregor believed that this was still the case in spite of the murder of Hugh Morrison. Morrison had died because, blinded by the strong sunlight on the heights, he had thought himself immune from the penalty of taking sides in a black man's quarrel.

So that Hogmanay, with two revolvers under his shirt, was not worrying to any extent about what would happen to Catherine. He was troubled, however, because of the demonstration he would probably have to make to induce Agwala to keep his promises.

And he knew that the ponderous chief of Agwala-town was desperately afraid of guns.

ELSIE and Fran Goddard lay in mosquito-curtained camp beds on the *Bonny's* after deck, partially surrounded by canvas screens and entirely free from the annoyance of mosquitoes and sandflies. It was much more pleasant to lie there than to sit on deck under the light and be eaten alive. And simply because one went to bed, it was not necessary to sleep.

"Where in the world could she have gone?" Elsie asked for the fiftieth time as the *Bonny's* bosun struck seven bells. "It's hours and hours since Garland was here."

"Oh, she's probably listening to Mac playing the fiddle," Tommy Dillingworth said assuringly from the other side of the canvas screen, where he sat in a deck chair and smoked incessantly. "I see his light is still burning."

"Fiddle, fiddlesticks!" Fran interjected. "Go home now, Tommy, and let us get to sleep."

"Sleep!" Elsie was horrified. "Do you think I could sleep before I was sure Cath was all right?"

"Tum-te-tum-te-tum," Fran ridiculed. "Run along, Tommy. You have no business to be hanging around a lady's dormitory any way. And this one hasn't any door or a roof. Go away."

Elsie snickered, but Tommy lingered a minute or two, hoping she would ask him to stay because she needed the assurance of his presence. But Elsie was silent. She had begun to count the beat of her pulse, wondering when she was going to have malaria.

So Tommy, murmuring a reluctant good night, strolled forward, altogether disgusted with life in general and Fran Goddard in particular.

He hung over the rail near the companion-ladder till Captain Walton joined him. Then, because there was nothing else to do, he accepted the captain's invitation to proceed to the smoking-room where they played cribbage and drank long drinks.

Presently the bosun intruded with a pencil-scribbled note which he said had been delivered by a Kroo-boy from Marsden's beach. It was directed to Captain Walton and read:

Captain Walton:—
I am going down-river with Mr. MacGregor and Andy. Don't let the girls wait up for me.
Catherine.

Tommy read it, too, and at once departed for the after deck and the "ladies dormitory."

"Walton's just had a note from Catherine," he announced. "It says——"

"Sh!" Fran Goddard cautioned sharply. "Elsie's asleep."

Therefore, Tommy whispered the rest of it and walked heavily away.

Fran listened to his lagging step for a little while as if it annoyed her, then resumed the business of biting nervously upon her underlip.

Her eyes were curiously wide—dilated—great black pools that were sullenly disturbed. All at once they stormed. She turned suddenly upon her face and beat the pillow savagely with her clenched hands.

"—— you! I want to sleep!"

The whispering voice of the bush echoed it mockingly.

CHAPTER XXI

GUNS

CATHERINE had but a misty realization of the journey between Marsden & Co.'s beach and Agwala-town.

When the launch had turned from the main stream into Agwala-town Creek, there came a blacker dark that made the walls of mangrove still more forbidding.

Canoes slipped past like ghosts, giving forth no sound save the swish of the paddles which was not unlike the rustle of a shroud. Others that dawdled close in to the bush whispered a little more excitedly than usual as the launch passed by. But it was all vague and indefinite to Catherine, who had a desire to turn a searchlight upon it to discover what it was all about.

"Won't Agwala be annoyed at us for waking him up?" she asked Garland while Hogmanay was occupied showing Andy where to go.

"He'll be annoyed whether we have to wake him up or not," Garland declared with a grin. "But I'd be willing to wager he hasn't gone to bed yet. He's a grand old night owl, is Agwala. His own people say he never sleeps."

"From what I saw of him, I should have said he was asleep most of the time. Are we nearly there?"

"In a few minutes. Just around the next bend."

"He doesn't expect us, does he?"

"No. But we won't surprize him very much. He has too many watch boys."

Catherine was visibly disappointed. The little adventure had a dark, midnight flavor, it was true, but it lacked the spice of uncertainty. Keeping the mosquitoes away seemed to form the most active part of it.

The next bend was accomplished without difficulty and in another minute the launch had scraped alongside Agwala's little wharf and Hogmanay was saying to the shadow-like figure of the watch boy thereon:

"Tell Agwala I bring Missy Cap'n Morrison. Make quick."

The watch boy, startled by the announcement, shot up the path to the town with hardly a second's delay. And he had barely disappeared when another, also carrying a bobbing hurricane lantern, came forward suddenly from a by-path to the right and took his place.

Evidently the second watch boy, when he saw Hogmanay, Garland and Catherine climb on to the wharf, did not consider himself and his solitary lantern sufficient for so large a visitation of white people.

So he made a thick, unintelligible noise in his throat and two more watch boys appeared out of the bush with a suddenness that made Catherine jump. She realized that Garland had spoken the truth when he had stated that Agwala had too many watch boys.

Garland took a firm grip upon her arm with his left hand. His right, under cover of a broad, flowing four-in-hand tie, rested idly on his chest.

MacGregor's beard made a better screen than Garland's tie, and as he grunted an order to the watch boys to go ahead, his expression indicated that Agwala was going

to keep the promises he had made at Forcados or else have reason to regret he had ever made them.

Andy remained in the launch and smoked the mosquitoes from about his ears. Without expressing any opinion on the matter, he condemned the whole business utterly.

Passing along a broad, well-worn bush-path and around a single turn, then past a straggling group of mud-and-wattle huts that became less scattered and developed into a large and fairly compact circle, Catherine was aware of only a blurred confusion of shadows and unclean smells, and of indeterminate things that lay around like animals asleep.

Then something huge rose up out of the dark; something with a light in it; and she stood before the house Agwala had built.

It was a white man's house, and Chief Agwala was secretly annoyed by the circumstance that he was not the first native chief who had built one. But it was bigger than that of any competitor, and when Catherine saw it, she wondered if she were not actually standing before one of Marsden & Co.'s house-and-shop constructions.

As a matter of fact, she was. Agwala had built his house after the pattern of Marsden's at Warri. Even the lower of the two floors, in imitation of the customary "shop," was used as a store-room and, like the general warehouse of the trading-factory, contained all things necessary to man.

Agwala lived "on top." In one corner of the house there were lamps burning, and as Catherine climbed the stairs, she realized that she had been climbing just such stairs on factory after factory all the way up from Old Calabar.

From the top of the stairs, however, she could see that Agwala-town itself was much as it had ever been. It spread out, all around Agwala's house, fawning in slavish squalor at the feet of opulence. Sordid, dank and sinister, and but vaguely indefinite of population and purpose, it was still but a meager shelter of a groveling people, huddling together in the heart of a sun-scorched mangrove swamp.

So that Agwala's house was all the more incongruous. It had no place in Catherine's picture. Particularly at that time of night.

His "reception room"—the equivalent to a trading-agent's office—was furnished in wicker from Madeira, and lavishly strewn with native mats more colorful than Joseph's coat. Here and there were enlightening evidences of Upper Niger handcraft and needlework.

But the extravagant number of lusty colored cushions that occupied the wicker divan and the chairs and overflowed, as it were, on to the floor, suggested at once to the initiated that Agwala had become possessed by a fad and had indulged in it to his heart's content.

He met MacGregor in the doorway leading on to the veranda, and even in his suave and oily moments—and this was one of them—he was simply a little less neutral than usual.

"*Doh*," he greeted MacGregor, Jakri fashion. "I glad Missy Cap'n Morrison come look me." He made a heavily stilted courtesy to Catherine. "You sit down? I hab boy bring drink one time."

Hogmanay waved the offer of drinks aside in a manner that sent Agwala back to his cushioned divan with an inquiring look in his eyes.

"No drink," Hogmanay said shortly, and evidently intended to waste no time with the finer points of diplomacy. "Missy Cap'n Morrison came talk trade palaver. Savez?"

Agwala nodded. Apparently he thought the prospect both new and interesting. He made no audible comment, however; simply settled himself among his cushions and waited for the discussion to begin.

"You 'member you talk with Missy Cap'n Morrison's father at Forcados?" MacGregor asked, as Garland casually took up a position behind Catherine's chair.

"I 'member. I sorry he done die. Sorry too much."

"You 'member you talk trade palaver?" MacGregor continued.

"I 'member."

"Then what's matter you no do them thing you promise to Missy Cap'n Morrison father?"

Agwala thought that over. He looked at Hogmanay with his head a little on one side and then slowly shifted his glance to Catherine.

"I no savez," he said simply—which is the Delta native's invariable answer to anything he does not care to understand.

Thick guttural whisperings from the village lifted themselves into the short silence that followed; a restless sound like that of some large animal moving uneasily and

grunting in its sleep. Hogmanay permitted the silence to hold for fully a minute, while he looked the bulky chief over from head to foot.

"Huh!" It was not often that MacGregor sneered. His contempt for Agwala seemed to radiate from him in sparks. "You no savez, eh? You're a small-boy, eh? No get sense in your head?" He reached his feet suddenly. "You lie! Savez? You lie like bushman. You trade in Siluko, in Koratown, and at Jardine hulk and in Lagos. You think I be fool?"

Agwala's eyes flattened just a little; then he shrugged his shoulders so that they almost touched his ears.

"You say I lie? Be all righ'. You be big man pass me."

And his glance traveled to Catherine and Garland, as if to inquire whether they did not agree with him that MacGregor was a bigger and more powerful man than he.

Hogmanay sat down again and tried another tack.

"You trade in Siluko?"

"Li'l bit," Agwala admitted with oily simplicity.

"Koratown?"

"Li'l bit. My boys go dere. I no savez."

"You lie! You savez, all right. You sent them there. But them time you talk with Missy Cap'n Morrison's father at Forcados, you talked different mouth. No be so?"

Another expressive shrug of the shoulders was the most of Agwala's answer. To which he added that if MacGregor was so convinced that he was a liar, there was not much to be gained by him saying anything at all about it.

Hogmanay's right hand slipped under his beard and Garland's sought the cover of his four-in-hand tie.

Catherine simply sat and watched Agwala's fat, shiny and imperturbable countenance with the fascination of one who was afraid to speak in case it might spoil the performance. Even the bat that whirled eerily past the door in its circling flight over the stertorously slumbering village, did not distract her attention.

"When white man make promise," Hogmanay said slowly, "white man do what he say. When he no do what he say, big palaver live. Savez?"

Agwala understood that and admitted it; so Hogmanay asked—

"You make promise to Missy Cap'n Morrison's father at Forcados?"

"I make li'l bit promise. Missy Cap'n Morrison's father make promise to me. But he done die. He no fit now to do um promise. Palaver set."

Hogmanay did not agree with Agwala's sophism. His hand came slowly from beneath his beard and descended, without any fuss or demonstration of hostility to his knee. Garland's hand also appeared from under his tie and came to rest leisurely on the back of Catherine's chair.

"*Cha!*"

It was then, just as she felt Garland's free hand grasp her shoulder warningly, that Catherine saw Agwala's expression change. As if the craven fear that lurked behind its smug and self-satisfied shelter of fat were suddenly uncertain of its security, a massive sort of restlessness shook him from head to foot. He sat bolt upright and the whites of his eyes showed for the first time.

Catherine stole a sidelong glance at MacGregor and discovered a large blue-barreled revolver resting quietly—but only too significantly—on his knee. And, following Agwala's fear-filled look behind her, she caught the glint of another revolver barrel that rested almost indifferently on the back of her chair.

Garland's grip on her shoulder tightened a little and she exhaled a deep breath soundlessly. Then smiled. This, she admitted, with another glimpse at Agwala's graying countenance, was most interesting.

The shrill whistling of the crickets in the bush seemed to grow louder and louder and the low drone of voices somewhere not far distant made the possibilities of the situation assume an explosive quality that was exciting.

"Now, we go talk," MacGregor said quietly. "And we go talk true talk. Savez?"

"*E-yaw! Cha!*"

"All right. Keep your seat. This gun, he nice, quiet gun when man talk true. But when man talk lie——"

Hogmanay left the rest of it to Agwala's imagination. The chief knew at once that whatever protection he might be able to afford himself later, he was, just then, in a hopeless position.

"I—I no savez what's the matter," he whined, and looking toward Catherine, tried to be friendly and indignant at the

same time. "I no do nothing. I be your friend, all same I be your father friend. Long time I savez your father. He be proper man. Them time me and him talk, we talk sof'ly, sof'ly all same proper man talk. Gun palaver no good. I fear. All man fear gun palaver. Trade go 'way them time gun palaver come. I talk true, Missy Cap'n, for sure, I talk true. Agwala no fit to lie."

Catherine listened attentively enough. Then, appreciating what was expected of her, and being conscious of an acute desire to take a hand in the game, she turned to MacGregor with an assumption of imperiousness that disturbed Agwala in no small measure.

"Tell him he must keep the promises he made to my father, and that if he doesn't, we'll find a way to make him. We're not compelled to tolerate any shuffling on his part, are we?"

Hogmanay nodded respectfully, and Garland had considerable difficulty in concealing a grin. Then Hogmanay interpreted Catherine's dictum, and added a few remarks on his own account.

The effect upon Agwala was most marked. He looked from Hogmanay to Catherine in a bewildered fashion, and it was evident that he did not know what to make of Missy Cap'n Morrison. There was a quality in the steadiness of her gray eyes that bothered him considerably. And, of course, there were the guns that made his fat quiver and upset his powers of thought completely.

Suddenly Catherine had an idea of her own. Perhaps it was a dangerous idea, but the moment it came to her, she was compelled to give voice to it. She spoke so sharply that even Hogmanay was startled.

"Tell him, on second thought, I may change my mind about the promises that were made at Forcados. If he has forgotten his responsibilities in the matter, we can forget ours, too. Tell him, also, that if he is looking for a fight, with guns or without them, Marsden & Co. will give him one that will make him the sorriest Jakri in Benin River."

Garland wanted to cheer, but Hogmanay, canny as usual and having some difficulty in concealing his surprize at Catherine's sudden vehemence, hesitated.

"Go on. Tell him. Who the dickens is he that we should have to come here at this time of night to argue fine distinctions with him?"

Agwala saw the fire in Catherine's eyes quite plainly. And, as Hogmanay had said, he knew the difference between a member of the family and a servant. MacGregor's attitude increased the difference, and Garland, standing behind Catherine's chair in so protecting a position, heightened the effect.

"What—what's matter?" Agwala asked Catherine respectfully. "You no savez I be your friend?"

Catherine dismissed the plea with a gesture that left no doubt, in Agwala's mind at least, of her position in the matter. She turned quickly to Hogmanay and said just a little impatiently:

"Oh, go on! Tell him what I said. You could also tell him, just for effect, that Abado isn't dead yet. I'm sure he wouldn't like to be reminded of that."

MacGregor's eyes brightened for a second. He nodded slowly and thoughtfully and finally began where Catherine left off.

He asked Agwala to remember that Abado was still very much alive. Also, until the Sobo was proved guilty of Morrison's murder, he was innocent in the sight of the white man's law, and his trade, in its substance at least, was just as purchasable as that of any other trader.

Therefore, since Agwala had not kept his promises, Marsden & Co. did not feel under any obligation to keep theirs. They could not trust Agwala again and did not care to make a new agreement. If they wished to trade with Abado's boys, they would do so.

Such, MacGregor concluded for the sake of emphasis, was the decision of Missy Cap'n Morrison.

Agwala gasped. His fat hands ornamented with diamonds that splashed rather than sparkled, pawed the air then in an effort to make himself understood. Catherine was plainly, as Hogmanay had predicted, an element he had not considered for a moment. And the guns——

"But—but Abado! He kill your father!" he stammered at last, while a cold trickle coursed slowly down his spine. "You go trade——"

"We go trade with all man," Hogmanay answered and rose to indicate that the discussion was ended, and Catherine immediately followed suit. "If Abado's boys bring oil, if all man bring oil and kernels—all be same. Palaver set."

Agwala sank among his cushions, as unmoving as he had been, but a minute before, a mass of excited gesticulation. Even the guns seemed to be forgotten.

He was not looking at Hogmanay or Garland. His attention was entirely devoted to Catherine who, he was sure, was altogether responsible for the complete reversal of the terms of his agreement with her father.

Catherine returned his rather blank stare with an ill-concealed contempt. For some reason or other, as she expressed it to herself, she hated the beast.

"Palaver set?" Agwala questioned, as though he wanted to be sure that her decision was final.

"Palaver set," Catherine repeated calmly and turned toward Hogmanay and the door.

The scuff of a naked foot sounded on the veranda. It was followed by that of some one who wore boots.

Agwala turned his head sharply. So did Hogmanay and Garland, who slipped their revolvers out of sight in a trice.

First into the lamp light came Roku, chief of Dowadda. After him, with his arms dramatically strapped behind him, came Arthur Garriman Bark.

Then Charteris, with Bark's revolver sticking in his belt.

CHAPTER XXII

"AND THIS!"

"AGWALA seems to be popular this evening."

Charteris regarded the little tableau as though it earned his unqualified approval. Apparently it did not surprize him in the least. Whether he had managed to escape the vigilance of Agwala's numerous watch boys altogether, or had simply, by virtue of his personality and the queer company he kept, walked roughshod over them, was a little problem no one thought much about just then.

For many heavy seconds there was a flat and breathless silence. Everybody looked at Roku and Bark—particularly Bark—and then rather blankly at Charteris again.

Agwala's face sagged and he sank deeper among his cushions. His dull little eyes narrowed and he waited, more in fear than in caution, for some one else to speak first.

Catherine drew a little nearer to Hogmanay and Garland kept his position at her elbow. When he touched her arm to assure her of his protecting presence, he discovered that she was trembling, and she drew away from him as though she did not want to be found out.

"I don't seem to be very welcome?" Charteris said, breaking the pause.

"Oh, ye're welcome enough," Hogmanay declared, studying the unique situation as cannily as possible. "But what have ye got him tied up like that for?"

"It's an outrage!" Arthur broke out vehemently, lifting his head with dramatic emphasis, as if the sound of MacGregor's voice had suddenly awakened him from a brow-beaten lethargy. "He has brought me here by force of arms, and I appeal to you, Mr. MacGregor, to assist me. I am an officer of the Crown. I wear the King's uniform and——"

"Aye. That's so. But it's no' the uniform I'm botherin' about." And then to Charteris in a friendly tone that was not without suspicion. "What's he been doin', and how did ye manage to dodge Agwala's watch boys?"

"We didn't. My friend Arthur has a lot of influence among watch boys and I persuaded him to use some of it."

"It's untrue! A gross prevarication! When he ordered them to remain at the wharf, and told them that it was not necessary to accompany us or announce our arrival, they stood around like sheep! Like sheep!"

Hogmanay glanced puzzlingly at Charteris, then at Roku, and finally at Bark again. The shadow of a slow grin was his answer to Arthur's indignation.

"Ye mean, they let him bring you up here and didn't help you a bit—as ye expected they might? Ye're no' a bonny sight, Arthur. What were ye doin' to get yourself into a mess like this?"

"That's what I've brought him here to find out," Charteris broke in easily. "Just a moment. I'd like to ask Agwala about it."

He went toward Agwala suddenly and with obvious purpose, and stood over him, looking quietly but fixedly down into his face. Startled at first, the chief burrowed nervously away. And when, for his dignity's sake, he did try to get a grip upon himself, and was on the point of uttering a blustering protest, Charteris calmly struck him hard across the mouth with the back of his hand!

"Here, man, here! What are ye doin'?" Hogmanay bellowed and started forward while Agwala cursed volubly in Jakri. Every one else gasped in astonishment.

Charteris paid no more attention to MacGregor than he did to Catherine or Garland, who hung bewildered in the background.

"You look him?" he asked Agwala and indicated Arthur Garriman Bark.

"*Cha!* You flog me!" Agwala screamed. "You make me small-boy fool!"

"Come here, Bark."

"Th—th—this is preposterous! I will appeal——"

"Come here!"

As Bark, visibly trembling at the knees went haltingly forward, Hogmanay drew back a step and watched. There was more in this than the naked eye could see and MacGregor was not the man to act too hastily at any time.

Catherine, wide-eyed and queerly cold, fumbled blindly for Garland's arm. She could not see Charteris' face, but Agwala's wrath was shrinking rapidly into a mumble and Bark's expression was a study in submission she did not like to look upon. Although he was ready enough to speak in his own defense, there was no rebellion in him when Charteris chose to insist upon it.

"Roku!"

The chief of Dowadda lurched to Bark's side almost without demur. In the presence of Agwala and so many white people of importance, he was more abject than a paddle boy.

When Charteris spoke again it was in Jakri.

"Agwala is the son and the father of dogs," he informed Bark and Roku complacently. "And you lick his feet. He is like a great fly that feeds on offal, and you lift up your hands to kill when you hear the buzz of his wings. His power is less than the hours that were yesterday, and when Abado the elephant stamps upon your bellies and on his, the laughter of the gray man will be heard among the people of the Ekoi whose country is in the shadow of the Kameroons."

Agwala started back, just as if Charteris had struck him again. And, in truth, Charteris could not have used a hippo hide on the fat chief's shoulders with more stinging effect.

Bark was so confused that he began to mutter to himself in his mother tongue and to look everywhere but into the face of Agwala's awful wrath. Roku, pitifully insignificant in his present surroundings, jabbered excitedly without uttering a sound.

"What was that ye said?" MacGregor asked Charteris sharply, while Catherine and Garland looked blankly from face to face in search of an explanation. Then, since Charteris continued to give all of his attention to Agwala. "Maybe I'd better get Miss Morrison out o' this before ye say any more."

"You should never have brought her into this reeking pest-hole in the first place," Charteris informed him blandly without turning his head.

Dropping into Jakri again, he continued:

"Agwala, the father and the son of dogs, has barked at Abado in the presence of the gray man. This—" and he indicated Roku and Arthur—"is the gray man's answer. And *this!*"

Before Hogmanay had any sort of opportunity to intervene; before Agwala, who squealed a Jakri oath and flung his fat, beringed hands up before his face, guessed his insulter's purpose, Charteris leaned quickly forward and his snake like right hand darted under Agwala's guard.

With a twisting wrench, he tore the heavy coral necklace and the sacred and all-powerful amulet from about the fat chief's neck and tossed them out on to the veranda!

The shriek Agwala gave then was more the cry of a wounded beast than that of a man; an ear-splitting yell that broadened into a roar, and then died out slowly and terribly in a whine that dimmed into a breath-taking quiet.

Below, the squalid village seemed to shudder and shrink from that sound as from a knell of doom. The blackness beyond the lamps rocked and swayed and when the ever listening ears of the bush heard it, the ever whispering tongues were stilled.

Even Catherine realized the appalling sacrilege Charteris had committed. Nothing could have degraded Agwala more or cast a more ugly smear upon his ancestry.

"Stop!" MacGregor's voice was like a miniature thunderclap. "Up wi' your hands!"

Apparently on the point of turning to face Hogmanay and the others, as the hurried patter and scuff of many naked feet came to every ear, Charteris stopped short. He could see one of Hogmanay's revolvers.

The other was on a direct line with the middle of his back. His hands, in simple obedience, went slowly above his head.

"Garland. Take that weapon oot o' his belt."

Hogmanay's Scotch was broadening in the excitement, and Garland who knew the big trader better than he knew himself, left Catherine's side instantly.

Faces that were all eyes and mouth appeared in the veranda doorway to remain there whispering in awe. Bark, filled with a speechless indignation, backed as far out of the limelight as he could, and Roku, sheep-like, followed him.

Agwala was leaning forward among his cushions, wiping a speck of blood from his lips. His eyes were glazed with passion, and when, without even turning his head, he gave voice to a string of harsh Jakri gutturals, the faces in the veranda doorway melted away in a soundless obedience that was scarcely human.

"Mind how ye step," Hogmanay cautioned Garland gruffly, and gave no hint of the fact that he understood the gist of what Agwala had said. "He's a slippery customer."

"But, Sandy," Catherine involuntarily protested, almost as much astonished by the suddenness of Hogmanay's action as by Charteris' demoralizing performance of a minute before. "Surely you don't mean to——"

"Keep out o' this, Catherine," MacGregor warned heavily. "No, Garland, not that side. Go round the other way. Aye. That's better. Fine!"

Charteris' face, as Garland plucked the revolver from his belt, indicated nothing more than an indifferent submission to the dictates of Hogmanay's thoroughly well-supported authority.

"All done?" he asked and began to lower his hands.

"No. Keep them where they are. They're too busy anywhere else. What have ye got to say for yourself, carryin' on like that? Are ye daft?"

Charteris laughed.

"You sound like an elder of the kirk, MacGregor, and I hadn't half finished with Agwala when you interrupted me."

"No? Do you know that he's just ordered his watch boys to be flogged on your account?"

"Certainly. He is a nasty beast. Always takes it out on the under dog and always makes them do his dirty work. Our friend Arthur, for instance."

"It—it's a lie!"

"Sh!" Hogmanay cautioned. "Not so loud." Then to Charteris: "What's he been up to? Maybe ye'll answer that now?"

"Attempted murder," Charteris declared so frankly that Catherine gave vent to an involuntary ejaculation. "He tried to pot me tonight with that gun Garland just took away from me."

"It's a lie. I was——"

"He tried to murder ye, ye say?" Hogmanay said ignoring Bark altogether.

"He was trying to murder Abado and included me in the preformance," Charteris admitted with still more astonishing frankness. "And I simply wanted Agwala to know that he had missed, and that it isn't proper for him to induce his hirelings to take pot shots at me. I was telling Agwala this when you interrupted me."

Even Catherine smiled. Garland laughed outright. The brazen impertinence of the man was something that mere words could not encompass.

"I see," Hogmanay said dryly. "You're so honest, you're most likely makin' it up. What were ye and Abado doin' when it happened?"

"Having a drink."

"Hunh!" And then principally for the benefit of Catherine and Garland, "Just as if Malkett wasn't sweatin' himself to a shadow looking for Abado?"

"If Malkett will persist in chasing the wrong man——"

"How do ye know Abado's the wrong man?"

"Perhaps it's because Bark is so anxious to kill him before he catches him. Perhaps it's because Agwala is such a fat and indecent liar— Oh, half a dozen reasons."

"And perhaps it's because ye know the *right* man."

"Perhaps. May I lower my hands now? I'm getting rather sick of this."

"Just a minute," Hogmanay said heavily. "I think I'll take Bark with me. And you, too, just to make sure o' things in official circles. Parker, I'm sure, would like to see ye."

"Not tonight. I am much too busy."

Again Catherine smiled. This, though she knew as well as any one in the room that Agwala, squatting like a great black toad

upon silk, was measuring the manner of his revenge upon Charteris as surely and as callously as he would measure out a cup of salt.

"Aye. Ye're busy enough, I don't doubt," Hogmanay agreed. "But I think your business can wait a while."

"Not tonight, MacGregor." The sudden edge on Charteris's voice was most marked. "I have stood here with my arms in the air, answering your questions and satisfying your curiosity, in the presence of a lady, simply to save a lot of shooting and the possibility of you killing somebody."

"Eh?"

Hogmanay gaped ludicrously while Catherine and Garland looked as if they were not sure they had heard aright.

"And I won't be disagreeable unless—*look out!*"

Charteris' voice, lifting suddenly in a shrill shout of warning, was startling enough. Then, as far as Catherine could see, he disappeared. His uplifted arms and silver gray head went out of sight beyond Hogmanay's bulk as if he had been standing on a trap door.

Something less than a second later, MacGregor found two steel wire arms wrapped about his legs below the knees and he toppled backward with unpleasant suddenness and force into a small wicker table. His arms were thrashing the air like flails, in an instinctive effort to preserve his balance, as the table and he crashed down together.

One of the revolvers spun along the floor to Catherine's feet. The other, in Hogmanay's right hand, had the wicker table on top of it.

A lightning fast streak of silver gray leaped for the veranda doorway and flashed through it just as Garland fired.

The shop clerk was faster and cooler than the majority of men would have been under the circumstances. But the bullet whistled wide of its mark and buried itself viciously in one of the veranda uprights.

"Good night, again, Miss Morrison."

The voice floated back to Catherine like a derisive echo of the shot. And, while Agwala shrieked wildly in Jakri, while MacGregor struggled in massive fury to his feet, while Garland sprang forward in useless pursuit, and Bark and Roku muttered nervously to themselves, Catherine drew a long, deep breath, and slowly stooped to retrieve Hogmanay's fallen revolver.

She took her time about it. Not because one revolver more or less would have made any difference then. But she was afraid Hogmanay would have been even angrier than he was if he caught her smiling.

SOME time later, when all of his unwelcome visitors had gone, Agwala squatted among his beloved silken cushions, holding a broken coral necklace and a cloth-wrapped amulet in his plump hands.

He was quite alone. The village below was almost still again; a quaking quiet that had an uneasy dread of the dawn.

Agwala's unctuous bulk was shaking with alternate rage and fear, and it would have been difficult to determine which emotion controlled him most.

His hatred was of the sort that strips the flesh from an enemy's bones, strip by strip, while the victim's eyes——

But, to his old and ever growing fear of Abado, was added a still deeper terror of a force he did not understand.

Abado was just a man; trade was largely a matter of price; but the gray man who never hurried, the old, old man with the face of a boy—there was no explaining the why or the wherefore of him!

Agwala had witnessed the amazing subjection of Bark. He had seen the still more astounding downfall of MacGregor; and he had no difficulty in remembering how Charteris had struck him—him, Agwala!—just as if he were nothing more than the least of his inofficial slaves.

Also, he remembered distinctly what Charteris had said about the "son and the father of dogs."

He could neither read nor write. The Jakri tongue knew nothing of letters or hieroglyphics. But the writing on the wall can always be read by the man who sees it there.

Agwala nursed his broken coral necklace and the sacred and all powerful cloth-wrapped amulet in his trembling hands and spelled out the letters one by one.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LAMENT

HOGMANAY was not in a conversational mood on the way back to the yacht and Marsden's beach. Aside from the circumstance that his feelings as well as

his body had been severely jolted by Charteris' unethical conduct, the manner in which Agwala had been ruthlessly manhandled in his own house, gave MacGregor so much to reflect upon, that there was little room in his thoughts for anything else.

It suggested to him, above all things, that he had probably made a grievous mistake in taking Catherine to Agwala-town; and also, because Charteris' amazing treatment of Agwala encouraged him to add two and two together and arrive at a fairly conclusive four, the events of the evening left no doubt in his mind about Abado being guiltless of any complicity in the murder of Hugh Morrison.

Naturally, conclusions of this sort occasioned a considerable mental upheaval, and as he moodily released Bark from his bondage, he said shortly:

"Ye can tell Malkett or the provincial commissioner whatever ye have a mind to. I'll have a talk wi' them in the morning."

Whereupon Arthur expressed his gratitude in terms so elaborate that Hogmanay growled testily:

"Tush, man! Ye don't need a dictionary to say, 'Thank ye.' "

In respect for MacGregor's feelings, Catherine and Garland preserved a discreet silence on the subject of Charteris' escape, and Bark's version of the story apparently satisfied his superiors inasmuch as nothing that was official came of it.

And, the following morning, after a night that was troubled and sleepless, Hogmanay had a long and private conversation with the Great Dane, who, from MacGregor's standpoint, was not nearly as grave as he should have been.

As a matter of fact, however, Hogmanay's story and his comments thereon, made Parker do a great deal of thinking in a short space of time. But the audible expression of his opinion when MacGregor had finished, was as startling and facetious as it was cryptic.

"Possibly the right thing to have done," he suggested soothingly, "would have been to have held the guns over Agwala while Charteris punched him."

"Hunh!" without a sign of a smile, and rising restlessly. "Maybe ye're right." A heavy pause. "I'm just afraid ye are. Aye, just that."

Hogmanay's bulk seemed to spread itself devastatingly over the little library. His eyes smoldered and his great hairy hands clenched with an eagerness that was most suggestive.

"Don't get excited, Mac," Parker cautioned quietly. "We haven't nailed——"

"Excited! I'm no' excited a bit! Not a bit! And ye needna be afraid I'll do anything rash. No' me. But ye canna expec' me to just *sit* when I ken deep down into the marrow o' me that it's true!"

"No, of course not," agreeably. "But we're only guessing, and until we find Doiidi— Well, that I'm afraid, is going to be as difficult as establishing proof even when we do succeed in finding him. Also, Charteris *etcetera* are no longer residents at Grandison's."

"No?"

"Not for the time being. He'll come back, of course. But his stuff is gone, so I imagine he means to remain away quite a while this time."

MacGregor subsided slowly. But he did not sit down.

"Dod! What a blind bat I was!" he exclaimed suddenly.

"Not any blinder than the rest of us— if it happens to work out that way," Parker said placatingly. "I think we all made the mistake of thinking Abado the cleverer of the two."

"He's a better trader!"

"Is he?" the Great Dane asked innocently.

Hogmanay glowered and thought a moment or two.

"Goin' back on your promises isn't good trading," he declared in rumbling disagreement.

"No, I suppose not. Nevertheless, the fat gentleman fooled Hugh Morrison, and I'm sure you will admit that was a considerable achievement."

"Aye."

Hogmanay's eyes lighted up again, but only for a little while. The sound of Elsie's laughter came from the deck as Tommy Dillingworth shot past the library door in obedient pursuit of a hard-hit tennis ball.

"Elsie has a bonny laugh," Hogmanay said reflectively after a while. "Too bonny for this part o' the world. Don't ye think, in view of what's what, it would sound better at Forcados or thereaboot?"

The Great Dane's smile was a trifle obscure.

"All right. If you can get them out of here by the first of the month or before it, I'll make you a present of a bit of the rope we use."

"Thank ye. But ye're the man wi' the authority. Why don't ye exercise it?"

Parker got to his feet abruptly.

"Let's have a drink. I'm as dry as a barrel of lime."

Hogmanay was agreeable enough, but before they passed out of the library, he had another thought.

"You're kind o' rash with your promises o' bits o' rope, aren't ye?"

"Why?"

"Well," cannily, "I'm just thinkin' he'd be an awfu' hard man to hang."

CATHERINE'S restless desire for action was not so pronounced that morning. She looked just a little subdued, and if Charteris' name were mentioned, she either ignored it altogether or calmly changed the subject.

She allowed Hogmanay to code her answer to her mother's cable; but no more than that.

"When mother begins to get our letters, I'm sure she'll stop cabling and worrying," she said in defense of her determination to remain. "And she will approve of everything I've done. She'd do the same thing in my place and probably not be nearly so patient about it either."

MacGregor smiled and did not dispute the point. Mrs. Morrison was a calm, level-headed woman; there was no question about that. But as she had married the late Hugh Morrison without sacrificing an atom of her natural assertiveness, Hogmanay was conscious of no regret that she had had the good sense to remain at home.

So that the *Bonny* continued to rock gently in midstream, while the raw, but soundless intrigue of the bush crawled creeper-like and with lightning speed throughout the length and breadth of the Benin country; silently reached out and up into the land of the Ibo even into the "street of N'ri," and dipped down into the villages of the chiefs of Brass.

In the few succeeding days—days of broiling heat and the weariness of a cramped environment—a sullen heaviness seemed to descend upon the face of the rumpled waters.

And the natives who plied up and down the river assumed an expression that suggested they were listening—always listening.

There was nothing imaginary about this. The sinister, whispering voice of vengeance that haunted the gloomy network of creeks or ran breathlessly along the narrow bush paths in the blackness of the night, was growing louder and louder.

In these few days, where the creeks were darkest, men died suddenly and without warning, and their bodies slid gently into Mother Niger's lap where the gurgling rattle of complaint in their throats was swiftly soothed into silence.

Whereupon, their women donned their oldest raiment and their brothers or sons became avengers of their blood.

So that it was necessary for every man to look behind him at frequent intervals, and canoes that had formerly traveled close in to the bush, sought the greater safety of midstream.

By these signs was it known that, at last, Agwala had moved; and like the great, black toad Catherine had compared him with, he had wallowed from his cushions of silk and the words he whispered into the ears of men were immediately translated into machete blades, muzzle-loaders, and, here and there, an occasional rifle purloined from the white man.

None of this was visible on the yacht, however. Even Hogmanay and the Great Dane had no proof of its actual existence. They knew simply of an unrest; a faintly perceptible rustle and stir that would ultimately express itself, in certain quarters, in a red trickle of blood.

Merely as a precaution, the watch on the yacht was quietly doubled. On the hulk and Marsden's beach the Kroo headmen were given monotoned orders to assign four boys to night duty instead of the customary one or two. But aside from this indication of possible strife, the river was, to all appearances, quieter and more sober than at any time since the *Bonny* had arrived there.

In these few days, too, the cluster of canoes about the hulk diminished almost hourly.

As Bart Jardine's stock of goods sank lower and lower; as he scurried frantically about the hold in search of a possible bale or case that might have been forgotten, the nondescript native traders who had poured the wealth of the oil palm into his long, lean

hands, drifted away from him to crowd Hogmanay's breakwater or to proceed to the business of emptying the warehouses and shops of the Siluko and Koratown independents.

Up at Grandison's beach, Ogulo-of-the-long-arms slept by day and prowled more cautiously than ever by night. He was in sole possession of the place, and, from a governmental standpoint, was not supposed to be there at all.

Therefore, on an evening, four days after the disappearance of Charteris, when a pale moon lurked intermittently behind scattered banks of clouds and three indeterminate shadows slipped in upon Ogulo from behind, there was no one to whom the ungainly dwarf might have called for assistance; nothing between him and death save the quickness of his ear, the swiftness of his foot and the ape-like length of his arms.

From right, from left and from behind, the shadows leaped out of the weed-grown clearing almost at Ogulo's feet, and struck with scarcely the sound of an indrawn breath for warning.

With a low guttural of surprize, Ogulo heard and sprang forward. Two of the machete blades missed his head by a hair. The third gashed his shoulder but did not halt him long enough for a second blow to be struck. He had no means of knowing whether his assailants were three or thirty, and, scurrying out of reach of those nearest to him, with astonishing rapidity, he bolted straight for the waterfront and plunged into the swift running river.

His pursuers followed, but only for a little while. Swimming as, in the Jakri country, only Ogulo-of-the-long-arms could swim, the dwarf speedily left the satellites of Agwala far behind and headed directly for Hogmanay's breakwater.

Arrived there, he cautiously became possessed of a canoe that belonged to Marsden & Co., and, without any compunction or apologies, he paddled out into mid-stream and then headed straight up river.

IT WAS the following morning that Agwala's forty-paddle canoe swung alongside Marsden & Co.'s gig-wharf. And Hogmanay did not think it surprizing that the paddle boys were silent.

Neither was he in any way astonished by the circumstance of the fat chief's visit, but he was glad that Tommy Dillingworth, who had come over from the yacht with Elsie to play a game of billiards, was on the veranda at the time.

Elsie was in the shop below just then looking for a new pair of mosquito boots small enough to fit her. She did not really need the boots, but she thought she needed the diversion of Garland's service and admiration. And, seated on a low pile of gray flannel trousers at the far end of the shop, trying on mosquito boots, Elsie was unquestionably a diversion worthy of any shop clerk's most devoted attention, regardless of how disillusioned and unsentimental he might be.

Afterward she was going over to the kernel store to try to make the tall, rather dramatic-looking kernel clerk become confidential. From what she had seen of him, he looked as if he were struggling valiantly with a secret sorrow and Elsie liked to listen and try to be helpful in cases of the kind.

Agwala waddled up from the gig-wharf and along Hogmanay's veranda with a bloated look of injury on his face. When he turned the corner, so that he came into full view, MacGregor put his hand on Tommy Dillingworth's arm and said quietly:

"No. Keep your seat. He'll not stay long."

Hogmanay also remained seated, and there were no social or even amiable preliminaries. The expression on the big Scotch trader's face was as dull and dead as a barn door, and he stroked his beard as if he had no interest in the proceeding.

He did not offer Agwala a chair and the fat chief did not appear to want to sit down. He glanced questioningly at Tommy Dillingworth, leaned against a veranda upright, and said heavily—

"What's matter you no pay proper price for my oil?"

"Your price too high," MacGregor answered briefly.

"*Cha.* Be same price you pay all time."

"Too high," Hogmanay repeated simply.

"I no fit to sell oil for little bit price," Agwala declared in the nature of an ultimatum.

"And I no fit to buy it for big price. Palaver set."

"*E-yawl*"

The exclamation meant nothing. It simply gave expression to Agwala's surcharged emotions as he was invited to look the whole truth in the face.

"You no want buy my oil?" he asked smoothly after a while.

"I want to buy all man oil—at my price."

Agwala's smile was sickly. But there was no manner of knowing what was actually passing in his mind. He glanced at Tommy again merely as an excuse to take his attention from Hogmanay, and then he looked out toward the *Bonny* and the Jardine hulk.

"I go trade for hulk," he said sullenly.

"All right. Plenty canoe trade for hulk."

Agwala winced and drew away from the rail. MacGregor's sarcasm did not miss its mark. Just at that moment the number of canoes about the hulk was something less than half a dozen. Consequently, there was no balm in that direction. Agwala might sell, for high prices, on credit if he cared to. But he knew there was no cloth or gin or salt or rice to be found anywhere—except in the shops and warehouses of Marsden & Co., and the trading-companies affiliated with it.

For a minute, perhaps, he stood flat-footed, facing Hogmanay, his great bulk rocking slowly with a rage that was but faintly expressed in the flatness of his eyes.

Then suddenly MacGregor rose, and Tommy made a quick grab for his arm.

"Mac!"

"Get off my beach!"

"Careful, Mac! You'll kill him if you hit him now!"

MacGregor paused and stiffened, and Agwala backed slowly away, muttering to himself. Tommy's hold on Hogmanay's right arm tightened.

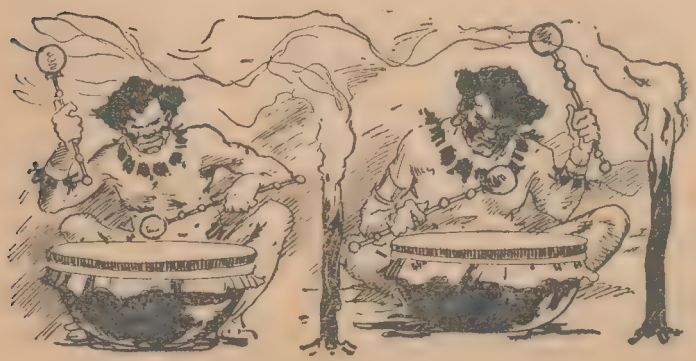
"Och! Why should I haud my hands?"

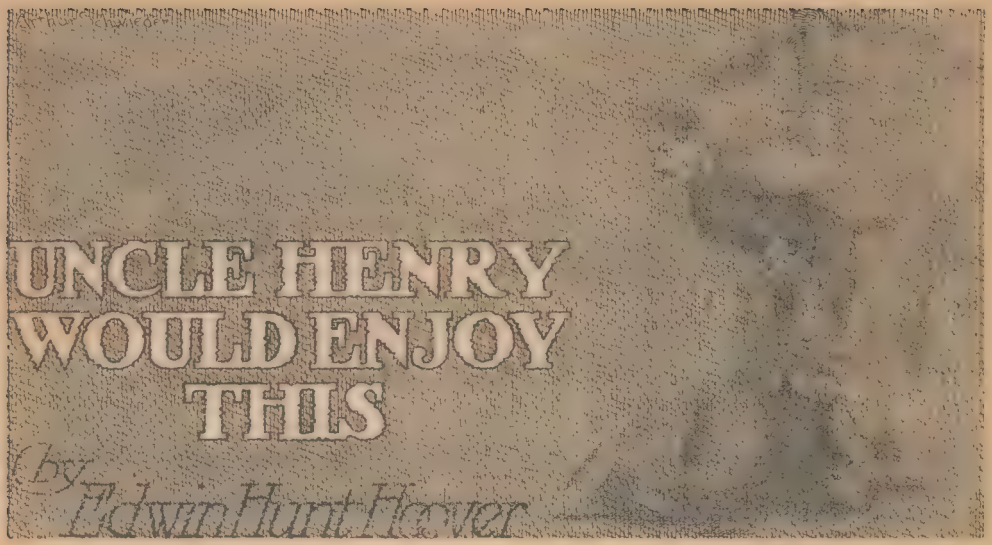
It was almost a lament. There was a look in Hogmanay's normally twinkling eyes that Tommy had never seen before. Agwala took his departure as hastily as possible, and waddled down to the gig-wharf again. MacGregor stood between two of the veranda uprights, a large hand wrapped about each of them, and watched every scuffling step the fat chief took.

He continued to watch as Agwala's canoe drew away from the gig-wharf and headed, as Hogmanay thought, for the yacht. But Agwala's destination proved to be the hulk, and when MacGregor was sure of that, he let his hands fall to his sides and observed, for the first time in several minutes, that Tommy was still at his elbow:

"Dod! I hope he'll no' tempt me like that again!"

TO BE CONCLUDED





UNCLE HENRY WOULD ENJOY THIS

by Edwin Hunt Hoover

ON A certain day in the long ago, five gunmen descended from surrounding hillsides and closed in on Henry Madrigal, cowman, who had assumed squatter's rights in the San Andres Mountains before Government surveyors had parceled out the country for purposes of homesteading and purchase. Madrigal fought a valorous but losing battle, drilling two of his assailants into eternal silence before the combat reached the hand-to-hand stage. Then he clubbed his long-barreled six-shooter and rendered two more temporarily helpless before a bullet nicked his valiant old heart.

Madrigal lived long enough to demand that some one look after his "children"—a little boy and girl, presumably waifs, who were known to be living with him. They had disappeared, and the supposition was that the killers had included them in their slaughter, but disposed of the bodies, ashamed of their inhumanity.

Madrigal also, during the last hours of his life, told Sam Barnhill, owner of the Fying Y, in lurid and specific detail what he thought of him.

Then he died, a martyr to the cause of range freedom. In traditions of the Southwest he still lives as a criterion of courage.

Two of the gunmen, of course, required nothing but burial for their services. The other pair apparently received what they thought they were worth and left for parts unknown.

Zeigline, the one killer who remained on his feet when Madrigal fell, squatted on the location until Uncle Sam's engineers platted, plotted and surveyed the San Andres. Shortly thereafter title to the Madrigal place passed to Barnhill—as Madrigal in his last moments had prophesied it would. Zeigline received his "pieces of silver" in live stock bearing a Box X brand—which, analyzed, was nothing more or less than the Madrigal "M" amplified and doctored by the branding-iron.

Even at that time Barnhill was controlling range factor. His five thousand head of cattle dotted the Flats that spread like a canopy at the eastern base of the San Andres. Madrigal had nested, several miles back in the mountains with a small bunch of live stock. This had made Madrigal's western range boundary identical with the eastern limits of Flying Y, which was intolerable to Barnhill, who saw in it a design to usurp his empire and steal his cattle.

He had dealt with it accordingly, vigorously and expensively.

"The old Madrigal place" thus became one of the numerous Flying Y camps. Later it was known as "Madrigal place." Today it is referred to as "Madrigal."

After this experience Barnhill looked to his defenses, determined never again to be afflicted by nesters. Like many great generals, however, he overlooked one strategic position. The Hackberry Hills bit a right-angled chasm into the southwestern extremity of the Flats and constituted a

"No Man's Land" into which Flying Y cattle seldom ventured because of its remoteness from water.

Barnhill never bothered to acquire title in the Hackberry Hills because everyone took it for granted that his "control" included them.

THUS, for almost three decades, Sam Barnhill dominated the range unmolested by nesters. Then Louis Bern returned to New Mexico from the nowhere and everywhere of cattle ranges in Canada, Chile, Mexico and points contingent thereto and remote therefrom.

Bern's appearance was not hailed as a "return." He had departed the country unknown and returned equally so. He took nothing for granted, but looked up land office records and discovered that Hackberry Hills were "open territory."

He entered into a partnership with the youthful, ebullient and wholly efficient Thad Wyman and developed a ranch consisting of two-room bunk-house, corral, wagon-shed, well and several hundred head of cattle which fattened in the Gramagrassed hills and valleys.

Among other things Bern brought back with him forty years of ripe experience, the muscularity of youth and a keen desire to plant his wandering foot where it would take root.

The tradition that a rolling stone gathers no moss held true with Bern. Likewise the axiom that an itinerant pebble acquires a polish more desirable than any lichenic growth. The physical burnishing was manifested in the smooth bronze of his always clean-shaved face where character lines were etched lightly, due to the firm flesh underneath preventing deeper inroads. The mental refinement was reflected in his speech, due probably to a painstaking study of pure Castilian—a sure guide to perfect English—and an ability to quote Shakespere with ease and accuracy.

Bern had drunk of the Rio Grande years before and had responded to another tradition that "when you drink of the Rio Grande, you must return before you die." Bern was far from dead, but he answered to the lure of the muddy waters nevertheless. He returned, not to die, but to live. To be sure, the Rio Grande flowed ten miles west of the Hackberry Hills—but tradition is allowed that much latitude.

A bond of affection, admiration and respect linked Bern and his youthful partner, quite aside from their business relationship. Friends characterized them as "Tiger" and "Cub." Each was all to the other, and they reveled in their plans, work and play.

"Only one place in the world I'd rather own than this," Bern was wont to comment luxuriously after a hard day in the saddle when he and Thad were enjoying their after-supper smokes, "and that's Madrigal Place. There's the last word in cow ranches—big mountains, living springs, pine-trees and range almost unlimited. A real place for a home. And Barnhill doesn't appreciate it. To him it's just one of the camps."

And Thad, as regularly, unfolded his secret:

"Barnhill only thinks he owns Madrigal. The forty acres he holds patent to are located nearly a quarter-mile from the springs, accordin' to the way Land Office records tally out with a secret survey I had made. Why don't we grab it?

"Either the boss chainman miscounted his chain lengths while runnin' his line from the township corner-stake—which is plum' easy t' do—or else the transitman trusted to his memory 'stead o' his notebook. Mebbe some land office clerk thought he knowed better how t' describe the land than Barnhill did—an' put it down 'southwest quarter' 'stead o' 'southeast quarter,' range, section, township so-an-so. Half the patents in this country are held on faulty descriptions—you know that, Louis—only neighbors don't gen'rally bother each other because they're friendly an' trust each other. Barnhill, he don't trust any one—an' I'd sure admire t' hang his hide on the barn-door. I don't care whose barn it is so long's the hide's ol' Sam's."

"What has Barnhill done to you?" Bern would counter.

"Nothin'. But you know how he come into possession of it—hirin' gunmen to kill off old Henry Madrigal an' then buyin' a relinquishment from Zeigline with Hank's own cattle. We've got as much right to it as he has."

"If I could be certain that Barnhill was behind the murder of Madrigal——"

Bern never finished his soliloquy because Thad was at him immediately with proof, evidence, legend and hearsay.

Barnhill unintentionally furnished the

partners with an important part of their amusement. He hired a cattle detective on the assumption that they were stealing his live stock. Goren, the detective, earnestly endeavored to catch Bern or Wyman in the act of rustling, but had indifferent luck because no thievery took place. Furthermore, the partners developed a disconcerting habit of doubling on their trails and coming up in his rear to rebuke his suspicious nature. The bewildered expression on Goren's face at such times provided them with merriment for days afterward.

One day, however, Bern tired of this pastime and advised Goren that his presence was no longer, and never had been, desired on B. W. range in an official capacity. Thereafter they saw no sign of him until the September afternoon when Bern cut the trail of Goren's horse leading from Flying Y plains country into the rocky inception of B. W. range.

"Interesting and undoubtedly true," Bern mused, studying the tracks carefully—he knew the hoof imprint of every horse in Goren's string of mounts.

The trail led through a pass in the red rimrocks and then angled south where it was joined by another.

"Thad's," Bern chuckled. "He must have seen Goren coming. They both stopped their horses and evidently had a chat. Wonder what it was about?"

Wonderment increased to anxiety when Bern noticed that Thad had reined alongside Goren and accompanied him on the southerly course.

He looked full at the sinking sun meditatively.

"It's time that boy was back at the ranch," he decided, "but judging from the freshness of the tracks and the direction they take, he won't get there for some time." The ranch lay to the northwest. "Goren must have gotten him interested in something to lead him down here at this time of day."

Another half-mile south, the tracks of the two horses led into a rocky cañon so destitute of grass that cattle rarely strayed into it.

"Strange place to go," Bern muttered. "Never was here but once before, myself. And I don't think Thad ever rode this cañon."

He spurred his mount, a magnificent blood-bay, to a fast trot. Daylight would soon fade, and he felt the necessity of following the trail to its logical conclusion. This was the most isolated part of B. W. range, and Bern was reasonably curious to know the reason for the pilgrimage.

He rounded a sharp jut in the cañon and solved the problem all in the same instant.

Gruya, Thad's mount, stood riderless, nickering into a yawning prospect-hole which had been abandoned many years before by the discouraged miner who dug it.

Bern's mental eye beheld the scene of tragedy as it must have been enacted; he reconstructed the events leading up to it: Goren had lured Thad into the desolate cañon on some plausible pretext and then, catching his victim off guard, the cattle detective had either pushed or knocked him into the pit. Boot tracks of both men offered eloquent testimony, and Bern overlooked nothing.

Bern hurled himself from the saddle, his copper-hued face faded to a subdued pink, and bellied his way to the crumbling brink of the shaft.

"Thad!" he shouted into the darkness—and the name rose up from the depths in echo to mock him.

"Thad!" again he called—and the rebound of his voice ascended with a force that seemed to smother him.

Bern had to summon all his reserve courage to make his third attempt to rouse Thad—

"If you are alive, Thad, in the name of God, answer me!"

From the confused jumble of noise rebounding from the bottom and sides of the abyss came the last three words, clear as if shot from a sounding board—

"God, answer me!"

Bern snapped to a sitting position and clapped hands to ears. The ghastly repercussion unnerved him.

Action served as a sedative.

Knotting the rope which he took from Gruya's saddle, he tied it to his own. A heavy rock, secured to the sixty foot length, dangled in midair.

Tense despair gripped Bern.

"'God, answer me!'" he quoted the resounding words that had leered at him from the open grave. "What shall I do? Thad is gone! Dead! And I can't even get his body."

For a moment Bern stood motionless,

his active brain grappling with the situation. The last glow of sunlight illumined his features into a semblance of some heroic-sized bronze medallion; the same glint of light caught dazzlingly at the smooth inner surface of his leather chaps where they had been worn shiny by his knee-grip on the saddle.

Then decision animated his muscles.

A flying leap carried him to Redman's back and spurs roweled the big bay to a frenzied speed up the hillside where led the tracks of a lone rider—the rider who had been with Thad up to the time they had approached the prospect-hole.

SWEAT blackened Redman's neck as he held the terrific pace, responding to Bern's commands of voice and steel. Bern knew that he must sight Goren before dark, otherwise the chase would be indefinitely prolonged; Goren might even escape.

The trail led down into the next cañon and showed that Goren was traveling easily, apparently without fear of pursuit. The isolated position of Granite cañon—where the crime was committed—with the meager possibility that any one would invade it for months, gave Goren a sense of security.

The chase led diagonally through Hackberry Hills toward the Flats, and Redman quickly closed the intervening distance. When dusk faded Bern decided that Goren could not be more than a mile ahead and guided his horse up a little pinnacle that commanded a view of the next cañon.

The sight of a lazily moving horseman in the hazy depths below inspired Bern to a gutteral exclamation of joy—choked back barely in time to save him from discovery. As it was, Goren turned in his saddle—listening for a sound that he thought he heard. Bern thought for an instant that Goren saw him, but continued to "freeze" in his place of semiconcealment behind the scraggly limbs of a scrub cedar until the man disappeared around a turn in the cañon.

Bern played a one-sided game of hide and seek for the next half-hour. He rode the ridges with utmost caution, stopping every few minutes to listen. As darkness shrouded the hills he followed Goren by sound. Always he rode a little faster than the man he was following, and gradually he widened the circle until finally he was in the lead.

Then he left Redman and, taking his saddle-rope with him, crept silently down the hillside, where he stationed himself in protecting shadow of a giant clump of mesquite.

Goren's first knowledge that he was not alone came when a *swish* of rope warned him—too late. A noose settled and tightened about his neck. He loosed the bridle reins to grapple with the strangling hemp and was jerked unceremoniously from the saddle. He hit the ground heavily and, before he could recover, Bern was upon him with the ferocity of a jungle beast and the science of a wrestler.

Face down in the shale, rock and sand, the cattle detective fought viciously against a paralyzing leg-hold. Bern shifted to a sitting position in the middle of Goren's back, always drawing the tortured leg toward him until the struggles ceased and agonized profanity began; then he used one hand to snatch Goren's gun from its holster.

"Pardon my seeming roughness," Bern panted, throwing a double half-hitch around Goren's ankles with the loose end of the rope, "but I'm in a hurry and can't stop to argue."

He hastily "dallied" the lariat's remaining slack around his own leg and increased the tension to maintain the leverage on Goren's limbs, drawing a hogging-string from his belt with which he trussed Goren's wrists.

Bern made short work of freeing himself from the rope, retrieving Goren's mount—which had stopped to graze outside the danger zone—and cutting from the saddle the leather thongs that, under happier circumstances, were used for packing purposes. From these he fashioned another tie-rope and used it to replace that portion of the lariat binding Goren's ankles. He also removed the noose from the detective's neck and delivered a few succinct remarks while coiling up the rope:

"This may seem a trifle unnecessary to you, but just now I'm in need of an extra length of rope for the purpose of getting my partner's body from that prospect hole. Also I want to be sure you'll be here when I get back. See you in about an hour and a half and then—I'll settle with you!"

Bern started to leave, then hesitated. He came back and observed Goren's tumble-bug efforts to free himself.

"I'll just fix you so I'll be fairly sure to find you when I return," he remarked.

He unsaddled the horse, carried Goren to a scrub cedar and cinched the saddle around both man and tree-trunk.

Goren protested luridly.

"Anything you say may be used against you," Bern warned with a sort of deadly playfulness. "Better save it. You'll need everything you have when I get back."

THE Autumn chill inspired Goren to efforts at escape. He knew that the double-half hitches knotted behind him at ankles and wrists, held him secure; the saddle held him immovably in place, but wriggling and squirming kept his blood more actively in circulation. Then, the sudden thought that Bern in retrieving the body of his partner would learn definitely how he came to his death twisted Goren's swarthy, mustachioed face into a grimace of fear, and he set to work in earnest to free himself from bondage.

He leaned back on the fleece-lined inner surface of the saddle and pressed down. It slipped a trifle as the circingles stretched. He repeated the operation again and again, sweating copiously with the labor. An hour passed and the saddle was midway past his hips.

Goren paused for rest and reflection. If he could free himself of the saddle it wouldn't be much of a trick to hop to a sharp-edged rock and saw his wrist manacles apart. Time was all he needed. He calculated how long Bern would be gone: It would take him at least twenty minutes to ride the five mountainous miles to Granite Cañon.

Then—how long would it take for two horses, pulling at a ninety-foot length of saddle rope, to drag Bern and his inanimate burden from the shaft? Goren pondered. It couldn't be done! The dead weight of a yearling on the end of a thirty-foot rope was all the average cow-pony could move. More than double that weight on even a sixty-foot rope would either stall two horses or break the rope.

Ninety feet of it would be impossible. Bern would discover this only after experiment that might be disastrous. At least it would delay him while he figured out some other plan. Then he would have to dispose of the body. Would he take it to the B. W. ranch? Probably. The county coroner would be called in to determine, officially, the cause of death, and he would find——

Goren had enjoyed meditation on the time element, but a forecast of the coroner's findings, with Bern to assist, spurred him to further activity. He had to escape or Bern would kill him. If Bern didn't, the law would.

The saddle slipped gratifyingly after another fifteen minutes of writhing and pushing; it fell to the ground, and the leather skirts pinioned his spurs. He kicked them free, bent over to find a fairly soft place on the hillside where he could rest his head—and then somersaulted from his saddle prison.

A jagged rock freed his hands after several minutes of awkward sawing, and his pocket-knife cut the ankle-thongs. All he had to do now was to catch his horse, saddle him and leave promptly in a southerly direction. He started to unfasten the cinch-buckles from around the cedar, wondering where Bern might be and what doing—when he heard the clattering hoof-beats of a galloping horse on the ridge to the north.

He knew then that Bern had upset the time calculation in some manner and had returned a full five minutes too soon. Goren abandoned the saddle and rushed toward his horse—which shied at his hasty approach. Goren cursed and made a futile grab at the trailing bridle-reins as Redman came slithering down the slant with Bern swaying easily in the saddle, uttering ironical comment and advice:

"Speed up, Goren! You're slow as a drag cow's tail. Do I note by the dim starlight that you were about to leave bare-back?"

Bern hurled himself from Redman's back, six-shooter in hand. Goren dashed behind a boulder.

"Come out of there," Bern snapped. "You can't hole up like a ground-hog. Come out this way and I won't shoot. Start in any other direction and I'll fill you full of lead."

Goren appeared, hands elevated.

"Now," Bern told him. "Put your hands down. I know you're not heeled. You need killing, but I can use you alive to better advantage. You're going with me to my ranch and there, with all the comforts of home at your disposal, write a confession about how you killed Thad Wyman—and why."

A remonstrance surged as high as Goren's larynx—and died there to the click of Bern's gun. He thought about his knife, buried snug and useless in the trousers' pocket under his chaps.

"Roughly," Bern rambled on, "it will run something like this: You met Wyman at the B. W. range-border and roused his curiosity about the shaft, which he'd never seen because none of our cattle ever go into Granite Cañon and consequently he hadn't been there. The two of you dismounted, and Wyman was looking into the hole when you hit him on the back of the head with a rock. He fell in and the rock went with him. I found it beside him. Any remarks to make?"

"You're so wise," Goren sneered, edging closer. "Maybe you know that Flyin' Y cows sometimes stray there."

"You ought to know. You rode B. W. range for months before I ordered you off. Perhaps a dozen a year stray into Granite Cañon. I saw one there tonight."

This was interesting information to Goren. He hadn't seen any. He wanted to know about it, but other things were more vital.

"An' what makes you think I clouted Wyman with the dornic you found by his body? Wasn't there any others near him?"

"Yes, but none others with hair and blood."

Goren had maneuvered within striking distance and sprang. His nose collided violently with Bern's left fist.

"I hoped you'd do something like that," Bern told him, tossing the pistol into a bed of gravel. "My hands itch for the feel of you. Your gun's in one of Redman's saddle-pockets; mine is where you see it—behind me. Get them if you think you can wade through me."

This was a chance Goren hadn't anticipated. Bare fists against a man twenty pounds lighter than himself, who insanely threw away his advantage. Catch-as-catch can—grapple—kick. Goren knew the rough-and-tumble game. Let him once get his arms around Bern——

He rushed. Bern drove an accurate "one-two" into the detective's midriff and followed with a hurricane of staggering blows to the face. Goren shook blood from his eyes and waded in for more, crowding Bern back toward the faint glint of the blued Colt. His arms flailed the air with a windmill motion and he felt he was making progress in spite of the fearful punishment he was taking.

Bern retreated before the onslaught of superior weight until his boot-heel rested on the butt of the six-shooter. Then he planted himself and shot his fist with the full power of shoulder and body behind it to a point slightly below Goren's left ear. The detective's feet cleared the ground, and he lay unconscious where he fell while Bern picked up the gun.

He was still prostrate after Bern had caught and saddled the Flying Y pony. It required the cold steel of a gun-barrel at the back of his neck to revive him.

"Any further remarks before you write the confession?" Bern inquired.

"Not none."

Goren mounted. Tears of agony crept from his battered eyes and scalded his abraised cheeks. His nose had been wrecked and faultily repaired at some former date; its condition was now hopeless.

" 'Cept I'd like to know how you got Wyman out o' that shaft so quick. Saddle ponies never drug you out."

"Of course not," Bern laughed as he rode beside his unfettered prisoner, with a peculiar exultation that puzzled Goren. "I didn't even try to use the horses. Didn't it occur to you that I might anchor one end of the rope to a boulder and climb out hand-over-hand with Wyman lashed to my back?"

"Nuh-uh," was Goren's ambiguous reply.

He looked at Bern in the faulty light with a new appreciation. He tested his jaw by moving it clockwise on its hinges and shook his head to determine whether his brains were still in place. He understood now why Bern's hitting powers had the qualities of a mule's kick. Prodigious brawn was required to pull a weight of over three hundred pounds, seventy-five feet straight up, with nothing but an occasional toe-hold to assist.

THE darkest part of the moonless night was upon Flying Y headquarters when Goren rode behind the high adobe wall that formed the east side of the corral. He spoke harshly to a companion rider, who responded:

"Be quiet. Nobody must wake up except Barnhill. Take off your spurs—take mine off, too."

Goren complied in utter silence.

The men tiptoed to Barnhill's quarters in the north end of the long adobe building that also housed the Flying Y cowboys at the southern extremity.

Goren tapped on the window while his associate partially hid behind the north wall.

Barnhill was evidently a light sleeper for he responded without delay, opening the window.

"Come outside," Goren whispered after a hasty glance convinced him that the other man was still on the job and keenly alive to his every movement.

Barnhill grunted:

"Guess I'd better. Mrs. Barnhill's asleep in the next room an' might hear us."

Ffteen seconds, perhaps, intervened between acquiescence and appearance. Barnhill, shirtless and carpet-slippered, stepped through the aperture and sat down on the ground, shivering, beside his employe, his back to the east wall of the house.

"I got Wyman," Goren announced sourly.

"Good," the cattleman growled through the bushy mustache that completely obscured his mouth even in daylight. "Did you fin'lly catch him stealin' stock?"

"Nope. I don't think he's ever rustled a hoof off you."

"You're a fool," Barnhill grunted. "Why else'd him an' Bern locate where they did—right alongside my range?"

"Good grass in those hills," Goren suggested. "Likely place to build up a herd."

"Sure—build it up at my expense. I'm satisfied they've been robbin' me blind—same as ol' Henry Madrigal use' to do before he got his. That's why I hired you—an' you'd 'a' caught both of 'em cold if you'd been onto your job."

Silence from Goren. He answered only after his employer inquired testily—

"How did you work it to get Wyman, then?"

"I led him down a cañon in the Hackberries an' hit him on the head with a dornic while he was peerin' down a seventy-five foot prospect-hole."

The detective spoke without pride, almost, it seemed, with reluctance.

"Serves him right, the —— thief," Barnhill commended. "Wish his pardner was there, too. But suppose some one finds the body?"

"No one hardly ever goes into that cañon," Goren replied peevishly. "An' what if they do? It'll look like he fell in. The fall's enough t' kill him even if I hadn't cracked him with a rock. I left his horse standin' there so's it'd look plum' natural if any one should happen along. In case they don't, the horse'll wander home after a while an' the country's that rough he couldn't be back-trailed."

"Sounds reasonable," Barnhill applauded in guarded tones. Then, cautiously: "How're you goin' t' keep folks from talkin' about you gettin' in so late? The hands'll all know what time you slip into the bunkhouse."

"I'm leavin' the country tonight," Goren announced, "an' want my pay It's three hundred an' twenty-five bucks."

"How come?" Barnhill inquired in the manner of one who knows the answer to his own question.

"I got twenty-five comin' for the last two weeks' ridin' an' three hundred which you promised if I got either Bern or Wyman." He spoke with some animation, glancing at the north wall of the adobe. "Well—I got Wyman."

Barnhill demurred:

"How do I know, except by your say-so, that you've earnt the bonus? Besides, what makes you think I've got that much money on me?"

"You've got it 'less you lied," Goren answered the last question. "You told me this mornin'—or yest'day mornin'—before I left here that the cash was in the safe in your office. You said further that it'd stay there ten days 'less I claimed it sooner on account o' breakin' up th' B. W. combination. If I didn't qualify for it in that time I was to get th' gate. Three hundred for either pardner—seven-fifty for both—was the agreement.

"One's all I care t' collect on. You go get the money, an' I'll furnish proof that Wyman's dead."

Barnhill climbed into the window and Goren found time for a snatch of conversation with the man in hiding.

Faint signs of dawn streaked the east when the cattleman emerged from the room. His hands were full of greenbacks and his eyes, naturally protuberant, were filled with amazement as he stared at his employe.

"How'd your face get that-a-way?" he demanded. "It looks like the last act in a barbecue."

"I had a fall," Goren explained. "Lookin' this way is one reason I'm in a hurry to leave here."

"Horse fall with you?"

"No, I fell off him." Goren's temper was wearing to a thin edge and his reply was acid. "Say, do I have to wait here till noon or do I get that money before it's good daylight?"

"Soon's I get proof that Wyman's been accounted for." Barnhill reluctantly talked business, though still fascinated by the bruised and gory appearance of the detective's features. "Show me somethin' belongin' t' Wyman——"

Goren interrupted wearily and rudely:

"'Somethin' belongin' to Wyman'? All right. How'll Bern do? Step out!"

He called to the man around the corner.

Barnhill's startled vision followed the direction of Goren's last two words and his angular frame almost collapsed at sight of Bern advancing from his place of concealment.

Bern approached leisurely, his .45 caliber six-shooter preceeding him with sinister smoothness.

If the Avenging Angel with flaming sword had made its appearance at that moment the effect on the Flying Y owner might have been slightly more enervating—though that is doubtful. Enervation was sufficiently complete to enable Goren to pluck the blood money from his employer's nerveless hands—convincing evidence that Mr. Barnhill was not his normal, tight-fisted self. Or perhaps he was satisfied with Goren's proof of fidelity to orders.

Goren left without troubling to count the currency.

Bern spoke first, the flash from his blue eyes—now visible in the semi-light, adding a certain meaning to his softly spoken words:

"Mr. Goren neglected to mention, I believe, that he was overtaken by the surviving member of the B. W. outfit. That will explain, perhaps, the condition of his none-too-Grecian features, but modesty forbids me to give the painful details. Perhaps I was a trifle testy, knowing, as I did, that he'd sent my partner to the bottom of a seventy-five-foot shaft."

Barnhill's comment indicated an entire lack of sympathy for either partner—

"I've been double-crossed by that——"

"—cross between a barbed-wire fence and a skunk," Bern supplied amiably.

"However, he didn't double-cross you voluntarily. Surely he wouldn't abuse the confidence of so splendid a gentleman as yourself."

The silken irony caused Barnhill real discomfort. He choked back an oath and bit a perceptible chunk from his mustache.

Bern continued amiably:

"Passing lightly over unessentials, Mr. Goren became sufficiently penitent to accompany me to B. W. ranch, where he penned a complete confession. You will be interested to learn that this confession of a not-too-penitent soul contained your name no less than twenty-one times and would seem to incidate that he had embarked on his career of crime to save his job."

"Why did y'u let him get away?" Barnhill snarled, regaining his natural poise. "Don't devil me with his doin's."

"I'll be perfectly frank with you," Bern pursued genially, modulating his voice as he heard voices in the bunk-room. "I let Goren escape because I promised to do so. Your recent transaction with him shows the sacredness with which you regard a promise, so I know you will understand why I kept mine—when I explain.

"Goren bought his chance to escape by writing the confession and by leading me to this place where I could hear you express yourself with such a charming lack of self-restraint. I might add that Goren knew that a gun was trained on him during all the time he was making his report to you and that it would never have been completed if he had warned you that there was a witness. If he had failed me I would have killed him without more ado—and slightly less regret."

"Go ahead an' kill him," Barnhill suggested helpfully. "He can still be overtaken, an' you've give him his chance."

"You have followed my recital with diligent care," Bern reproved him, "but you never seem to get ahead of me. Wouldn't it be an act of rare discretion on your part to offer me hush money. Somewhat on the order of your arrangement with Zeigline after he and his companions killed Henry Madrigal——"

Bern had expected an outburst at this suggestion. Instead Barnhill snatched eagerly at it—

"How'd five hundred dollars do?"

Bern controlled his emotions, but a new quality crept into his voice—

"Come around to the north side of the

house where we won't be seen when the boys come out of the bunk-room."

Barnhill obeyed uneasily, wondering what counter-proposition he would have to deal with, but relieved when Bern sheathed his gun.

"When I came back to New Mexico I heard—and only half-believed—the story about Henry Madrigal's being killed at your orders. The fact that Zeigline apparently got nothing but the Madrigal M cattle—changed to a Box X—for his relinquishment to the place gave it some semblance of foundation. I know that you rode up to the Madrigal place a very few minutes after the old man was killed, too, and were apparently on friendly terms with the gunmen—but that didn't prove anything. My impression was that the dirty cowards who hire assassins for their work lived only in fiction. However, the business of this night convinces me that at least one is alive. If that wasn't enough, your remark of a few minutes ago would be plenty.'"

Barnhill snarled again:

"We're dealin' with the present. The past is dead an' buried."

"In one sense only is it dead and buried. The present links itself with the past rather importantly," Bern retorted. "You'll remember the two children, orphans, who were living with Henry Madrigal at the time your men killed him. Well—I'm one of them. The other was my sister. Cudgel your memory a bit and see if you can't remember that the children's names were Louis and Louise."

It was evident from Barnhill's ghastly pallor that he did.

"Sis and I were back in the hills gathering wild raspberries when the shooting began. She ran, I after her, and we got back in time to see Uncle Henry—yes, he was my mother's brother—lying apparently dead and strangers in possession of the place. We didn't know exactly what it all meant, but we decided that men who would kill lovable old Uncle Henry would do the same to us. So we didn't give them the chance. We tramped to Roswell—and it was a hideous trip for us kids; Sis was nearly dead when we arrived. I got a job as errand boy in a grocery store; later, I worked as a horse-wrangler and sent Louise to New England where we had some distant relatives. Then I started out to see the world. I've seen it now and came back here to settle down because I love the country—it contains the only memories of a home that I can remember—Uncle Henry had mothered Louise and me since we were babies."

"Henry Madrigal's nephew!" Barnhill found his voice after exercising his Adam's apple for several minutes.

"Yes," Bern answered levelly. "And you've sent your killers against the two men who have been the best friends I've ever known. One substituted for my mother—and did as good a job of it as any man could do; the other my pal—you probably don't know what the word means in its glorified sense—the sort that I'd liked to have had as a son if I'd ever married. You even cost me the privilege of growing up with my sister—she died ten years ago—by destroying our home.

"In view of these things I'm going to sell the B. W. ranch to you—at my price. My reasons are, I suppose, obvious to you—I don't want it because of the associated memories. I'll sell the whole layout, lock, stock and barrel, reserving only the saddle-horses, for twenty thousand dollars."

Barnhill stared glassily at the northern horizon.

"Do I understand that Wyman's disappearance will always remain one o' the mysteries of this country in case I buy at your price?" he asked, biting another section from the overhanging brush on his upper lip. "That's a full five thousand more'n the outfit's worth. It's a hold-up."

"It may be," Bern snapped in a tone that roused Barnhill to the need for more guarded utterance, "but it's not murder. I need twenty thousand to carry out a plan that Thad would approve. He's often mentioned it, but there's always been an obstacle in the way, and I'm willing, for the sake of accomplishing this thing, to keep quiet about Goren's confession.

"I'd suggest, therefore," he concluded briskly, "that you make out your check for the amount named and we will then proceed to Marona—the county seat—in your high-powered flivver, where the cashier will do some certifying where it will do the most good; also we can complete the transaction while we're there and B. W. will belong to you before the day is over."

"But how can you give title to the place without certifyin' to Wyman's death?" Barnhill inquired.

"Quitclaim. Thad's idea," Bern replied

tersely. "When we found that you'd put a detective on our trail, he insisted that we each quitclaim to the other in case of accidents. I thought it was useless—but I see now that he knew your caliber."

"Where's y'ur horse?" demanded Barnhill with sudden animation.

"Behind the corral," Bern told him promptly, sensing and sympathizing with Barnhill's desire for secrecy.

"Get 'im quick. Lead 'im around here. Unsaddle; throw your kak inside this door an' ride bareback into the horse pasture while I jockey my car out o' the wagonshed. I'll pick you up in about five minutes. Snappy, now, before any o' the hands tumble out o' the bunk-house an' see you."

Bern was on his way. He knew that Redman, sweat-stained and leg-weary, would betray his nocturnal visit to the horse-wrangler, who would be on the job within fifteen minutes,—but that was something for Barnhill to worry about. Speculation would be rampant among the Flying Y cowboys immediately upon discovery of Bern's horse in Flying Y pasture—and Barnhill could think of his own explanations.

BARNHILL'S sense of business acumen was outraged by the price he was called upon to pay for a "two by twice" cattle outfit. The same inner prompting, however, told him that while the monetary consideration was far above the market value, it bought a protection worth infinitely more—if Bern would keep his promise to remain silent.

He decided that the next time he required the private and violent services of a cattle detective he would hire someone who knew the value of a clean getaway.

A lurking suspicion that he was being victimized found expression as he was piloting his runabout along the sandy road to Marona.

"Say," he jerked out, "we don't do any business till I see that confession you say Goren wrote."

Bern, who had been soliloquizing on the softness of saddles as compared with the once springy seat he now shared with Barnhill, smiled easily.

"I'm surprized you didn't think of that before. While you're busy with that steering wheel, I'll just spread it out for your inspection. It would seem, though," he rebuked his companion, "that you might be willing to take the word of a trusted employe who reported the work done, thus showing great fidelity to your interests."

Barnhill's jaw muscles moved as if his tongue had been inspired to voice a fitting rejoinder—then relaxed. Bern reached into his inside vest pocket—he wore no coat—and produced the document which he held where Barnhill could read it.

The contents evidently made unpleasant reading matter.

"He lies," was the only comment.

"Your soft impeachment would sound a trifle more chummy if I hadn't been an ear—and eye—witness to your cheerful conversation with Goren," Bern remarked returning the paper to his pocket. "Perhaps, as additional proof you'd like to inspect the shaft in Granite Cañon. I could let you down with a rope."

Barnhill's rugged features registered irritation at the first part of Bern's comment and a violent distaste at the latter. He was sufficiently in Bern's power now without submitting to being tied to one end of a rope over which Bern had complete control.

The gasoline sand-boat did most of the talking for the remainder of the fifty-five mile trip to Marona, and conversation in that bustling county seat was confined strictly to the business of purchase and sale of B. W. ranch and cattle.

Bern thanked Barnhill cordially for the offer—which was not made—of a ride back to Flying Y headquarters and requested that his horse be kept in pasture until called for.

"I'm headed south on the evening train," Bern confided, "and you probably won't see me for some time."

Mr. Barnhill's mobile features again registered a sentiment which Bern interpreted to mean that if the Flying Y owner never saw him again, that would be soon enough.

THE following week provided interest for all persons who knew Thad Wyman, Louis Bern or Goren.

The purchase of B. W. by Barnhill would have caused little comment had it not been accompanied by the disappearance of both partners and the Flying Y rider. Rumor from Marona had it that Bern alone represented B. W.'s interests at the sale and that he used a quitclaim to complete legal

formalities. It became known, too, that Bern's mount remained at Flying Y while "Gruya," Wyman's favorite pony, had been at the home ranch when Barnhill's cowboys tallied out the newly purchased live stock.

Barnhill, for reasons of personal policy, kept his own counsel with regard to Bern and Wyman and explained the departure of Goren on the grounds of an urgent message from home folks in Texas.

Another phase of Barnhill's personal policy induced him to drive into Tedler—shipping-point, post-office and merchandising center of that territory, eleven miles north of the ranch—to ask Hal Currie, the deputy sheriff, whether anything had been heard about Bern or Wyman. He was anxious to learn whether any foul play was suspected or discussed.

Currie's mouth being too full for polite utterance at the moment, he emptied it of liquid content before replying. Then he said he "reckoned Bern and Wyman knew what they were doing and would show up when they got good and ready."

The trip to town was not, however, without thrills for Barnhill.

A letter postmarked El Paso sent him flying to the hotel telephone. After being connected with a Marona number, he gave excited directions and waited perspiringly for a return call. When it came, after a half-hour interval, he swore venomously into the transmitter and ordered that a surveying crew be shipped to Tedler on the afternoon train.

Emerging sweatily from the phone booth he drew the letter from his pocket and reread it to assure himself that he hadn't excited himself unduly.

He had not. The letter read:

El Paso. Sept. 30.

DEAR MR. BARNHILL:

This will introduce the T. L. Cattle Company, which respectfully requests the immediate removal of all Flying Y cattle from the water known as "Madrigal."

This land, we are informed, has long been considered Flying Y property, but a survey, made preliminary to our purchase of same from the Government proves otherwise. Your holdings, some forty acres secured by patent, are located about four hundred yards south of the ground you claim.

Our leases, in addition to what we have acquired by purchase, fully protect our interest in the range. While, of course, your cattle have a perfect right to graze on the forty acres you own, the range will, I think, prove too limited and dry for either comfort to them or profit to you.

I will take this opportunity to make an appointment with you at the Tedler hotel for the morning of October 2. I will arrive on Number Four, which is due at 10:30. Better make it about the time of my arrival as a trainload of T. L. cattle will land in Tedler shortly after the passenger. The stock will be driven to Madrigal immediately as the four-hour ride from El Paso will not necessitate their being held for rest in the stock pens.

Yours very truly

LOUIS BERN, Manager.

Citizens of Tedler contend that Barnhill frothed at the mouth that last day of September and cursed lawyers, surveyors and Louis Bern with equal and animated ferocity. He talked mostly to himself, but Hal Currie overtook him on the board sidewalk in front of Elliott's store after hearing the name of Bern mentioned hotly.

"Do I gather that you heard from Louis Bern?" Currie inquired sociably, lighting a long, crooked stogie.

"Blah!"—or words to that effect—answered the harassed cattleman.

"Does he say where he's been or what he's doin'?" the plump deputy pursued the subject, apparently absorbed in the sputtering end of his smoke.

He looked up, expecting a reply; then, in utter surprize, he craned his neck, owl-like, and saw Barnhill stumping angrily in the direction whence he had come.

BARNHILL'S operations during the next forty-eight hours subsequent to the receipt of Bern's letter were guided largely by three important considerations: (first) The surveyors hired by him verified Bern's statement that Madrigal was not Flying Y property; (second) Bern was possessed of information and proof that would ruin him; and (third) Barnhill, though an oppressor and a bully, felt a very personal and physical fear of the bronzed cowman who spoke with sardonic gentleness while his eyes glittered with a menace of sudden death.

The cattleman, seated on the Tedler hotel gallery waiting for the arrival of Number Four, reflected moodily on the scurvy trick played by the Rio Grande in reaching out to the ends of the world and bringing back the man who as a child had drunk of its turgid waters.

This circumstance was no less incredible—and no less true—than the fate that had caused him to cross the trail of Louis Bern, the nephew of Henry Madrigal, twenty-nine

years after the old pioneer had laid down his life for the same underlying cause that brought about the original conflict.

Most unbelievable of all was that Bern, of the Madrigal blood, should come into possession of the hills and valleys his uncle lost—after fighting and dying for them.

Number Four steamed into the station where most of Tedler's population—some three hundred when they were all at home—was gathered.

Amazement and joy held them speechless as Louis Bern descended the day coach steps. Then:

"Thought you'd left us for keeps!"

"How come?"

"Welcome to our fond embrace!" greeted him.

Hand clasps and slaps on the back—also a trampling of his toes, which were clad in a pair of new, elegantly stitched riding-boots—followed. Bern's weathered face relaxed into smile-lines and crows' feet as he shook sinewy paws, two at a time.

"I didn't think any one'd miss me," he declared happily. "Only been gone a little over a week."

Some one asked, "Where's Thad?" and Bern pretended not to hear. He whisked off his gray, undented, wide-brimmed hat—also new—and cleared a path for himself.

"See you all later and talk till I'm out of breath," he promised them, "but I can't stop now; got an appointment to meet Mr. Barnhill at the hotel."

A half-dozen cowboys and citizens were still at his sides and heels when he approached Barnhill.

The rancher, without offering to shake hands, suggested that they retire to his room on the second floor.

"More privacy," he recommended, significantly eying Bern's retinue of followers.

The lone chair in Barnhill's room induced Bern to park himself on the bed.

"I judge you got my letter," Bern opened fire smilingly.

A wry twist of the cattleman's mouth answered. He was looking out of the window.

"Is there anything further for us to mill over?" Bern inquired.

"Yes, there is," Barnhill stormed, suddenly jumping to his feet. "I've got all possible o' my cattle moved from Madrigal, but there's still five thousand dollars' worth of improvements there an' you needn't think y'u can steal that, along with th' range. I'll fight y'u to a finish 'less I get paid for it."

"Tut, tut," Bern chided him. "I have stolen nothing. I'm merely collecting in part for thirty years' use of Madrigal place—my rightful inheritance. And Uncle Henry paid a thousand times over—with his life—for any improvements you've made. For all that, my partner and I are willing to——"

"So," Barnhill sneered. "You cash in on the death o' your friend Wyman an' then gather yourself another pardner in less'n two weeks. What kind of a man do y'u call y'urself? That boy—" he waxed sentimental—"still layin' in a cold hole in the ground an' you gallivantin' 'round on the proceeds o' his death."

A blue blaze leaped into Bern's eyes.

"It will probably ease your tortured soul to learn that I saw to the reclaiming of Wyman's body the historic night when Goren, at your orders——"

"Where did y'u bury him?" Barnhill cut in breathlessly. "Won't some one be ap' to find the grave?"

"That's for you to worry about," Bern shot at him. "All I promised to do was keep quiet about the confession."

A cattle-train snorted past the station and both men watched it back on to the switch and move to the railroad stock pens.

Bern reached for his hat.

"Come along with me to the pens and I'll tell you something for the good of your soul," he said.

Barnhill concurred grumpily. He must learn where Wyman's grave was located and make certain that it wouldn't be discovered.

"You remember I told you that I needed twenty thousand dollars to carry out a plan of Thad's?" Bern recalled as they clattered down the hotel stairs. "Well—he wanted to take Madrigal place away from you. He knew about the defective title long before I came into the country. And I couldn't think of any more fitting way to avenge him than by making good on his favorite idea and using your money to do it. Poetic justice, I'd call it, particularly as it brings Madrigal place back into the family—where it belongs."

Barnhill bristled like an angry dog. He didn't enjoy being ridiculed—particularly by a man who had stripped him of

thousands in money and the cream of his range. The fact that he had laid himself wide open to the attacks and deserved the penalty didn't ease the agony.

Bern grinned.

"It will interest you to know that my present partner was taking a gang of surveyors out to Madrigal place the same day I sold B. W. to you. I waited for him in Marona till he got back with the description of the land and we made our purchase before the land office closed. His name didn't appear on the papers so your attorney put all the blame on me. As a matter of fact, though, I've given him an undivided half-interest in Madrigal."

Barnhill snorted—

"Dickerin' with an outsider while you an' Wyman were still pardners—or else you throwed in with this other party before Thad was cold in death."

The caboose of the cattle-train was less than ten yards up the track and three cowboys filed out of the door, clambering from the steps as the brakeman signaled the engineer. The train crunched to a jarring, jangling stop. Cattle bellowed.

"Is one o' those waddies your pardner?" Barnhill asked, looking at the strangers.

"No," Bern puzzled. "I thought he'd be the first one out—oh, there he comes now. Take a slant at the crippled waddie in the doorway."

Barnhill took a slant—and continued at it, stupefied and spineless.

"That's my partner—the 'T' part of the T. L. brand," Bern informed him dryly. "Smart boy; fell down a seventy-five-foot prospect-hole after being hit on the head with a rock, and had the sense to land on the carcass of a Flying Y cow; only broke his collar-bone and had a bad headache."

From the back platform Thad Wyman kissed his fingers coquettishly at Barnhill and paved the way for friendly gossip:

"Next time you write to Goren just mention my name an' tell him that I approve his confession in *all* respects—even though he did overrate himself as a thorough workman. I was in the bunk-room rubbin' horse liniment on my head while he an' Bern were millin' things over in the kitchen at B. W. Remember it took *five* gunmen, workin' overtime, to clean up on Henry Madrigal, an' while I know I ain't in his class, still I think you insulted me by sendin' only one——"

"Meanin' just what?" demanded Hal Currie, who headed the gathering crowd that swarmed near the caboose steps to bid Thad "welcome home."

The question stung Barnhill's somnolent powers of locomotion into vigorous activity. The defunct B. W. partner, now present and too much alive, was bound by no pledge of secrecy; and the deputy's query would, he astutely surmised, bring disclosures in no wise calculated to increase his popularity. He pawed into the throng—there being no other way to escape—with an eye to the two hundred yards of clear space separating the hotel from the stock pens.

"Meanin'," Thad grinned cheerfully as he saw "Balmy" Summers of the Army (R. M. E.) outfit blandly step on Barnhill's instep, thus impeding progress, "that Barnhill hired Goren t' kill either Bern or me. Goren chose me as bein' the easiest t' handle an' clouted me with a rock while I was admirin' the depths of a shaft in Granite Cañon—an' I come so close to th' Pearly Gates that I could hear harp music—or mebbe it was the well known Bells o' ——."

"Gallopin' swordfish!" tiny "Slat" Akers uttered his favorite war-cry.

"Git 'im," yelled Currie. "The jail's full o' croakees, but there's room for a louse."

Barnhill gained the clear and was two jumps in the lead when Thad's audience grasped the full import of what he said.

Some one howled "tar," to which there was a response, a roar, of "feathers." Then "a rail" and the bedlam of shouts that characterizes a mob in hot pursuit of its victim.

Bern leaped to the platform, beside Thad; watched Hal Currie, with an amazing burst of speed, outstrip the crowd and hurl his portly bulk at Barnhill. They crashed to earth. Above the noise and clamor rose Currie's voice, shrill with authority and excitement:

"Lay off 'im. He's my prisoner an' I'll see that he gits all that's comin' to 'im."

And Bern answered the swelling tide of emotion and memory within him by the simple soliloquy—

"Uncle Henry would enjoy this!"

Author of "The Camp Robber."

WINTER descended over night and laid its cold grasp upon Tanana. In the morning when the drowsy sour doughs rolled out from their bear-skin robes they saw the Yukon lying silent and rigid. Invisible fingers had stilled the push and grind of passing ice cakes, building a winding, jagged causeway a thousand miles to the Bering. Another nine months of isolation would pass before the river would tear loose its restraining ice fetters.

From the chill barrens to the north, shrieking winds came scurrying with burdens of driving snow. Among the black spruce thickets the narrow trails showed white, crawling tortuously through pass and over summit. Men shivered and began to repair their dog harnesses and snowshoes.

But up the river, two miles above the little string of cabins that comprises Tanana, and just below where the Tanana River throws its gritty flood into the Yukon, the frost king had been foiled. Through some prank of the current, which at this point foams against the upper end of Bull Island, the ice cakes, jostling each other on their way to the sea, had been swirled aside, and when the grinding procession had halted, a large stretch remained open, skirting the island and extending out a considerable distance from shore. It was directly across the river from the village of that superstitious tribe, the Tananas.

Oksook, the old medicine-man, peered out over the river at the distant dark stretch, shook his matted head ominously and muttered of bad signs.

But the young bucks laughed. Who believed Oksook? His medicine had lost its power. The medicine-man of the Kantishnas had cast a spell over Oksook. He had better go off and die.

The old man chewed his toothless gums angrily and crept into his dirty little hovel. How things had changed! Oksook was not an Indian. His was a parentage of a burly Russian soldier and an Eskimo squaw. He had spent his fatherless youth and early manhood on the desolate salt marshes of the Yukon delta. What a terrible struggle for existence it had been, searching the blizzard-swept floes for seal and walrus, and crouching through the long Winters in stinking igloos. The hardships had forged him into a powerful, sinewy hunter who threw a harpoon with accuracy and force.

Then had come the gold-strike up the Yukon at Dawson. Thousands of white men came hurrying north to the Island of St. Michael. Great river-boats were built to carry the passengers and freight up-river.

It was on one of these boats that Oksook got a job as pilot and came to leave the dismal wastes by the Bering. There were no eyes keener than Oksook's to detect snags and sand-bars beneath the roily waters.

Time brought him far up the Yukon to

the Tananas. Disease and whisky had not yet contaminated this sturdy tribe, and Oksook found the lithe, slender squaws much to his liking. They were not like the fat, greasy Eskimo women on the coast.

With his new manners and air of bravado picked up from the boisterous boat crews he soon ingratiated himself into the favor of the tribe. Cunning and patience inherited from his Slav father gained him fame and prestige. He came to be known among the various tribes on the Yukon and Tanana rivers as Oksook, the Great Medicine-Man.

Month after month, year after year he sat in his little cabin among his pots and bags of herbs, brewing, muttering and sleeping, while the hunters brought him the fattest salmon and sweetest moose livers. In return for these favors Oksook made charms so that when the countless hordes of caribou migrated north to their Winter feeding-grounds in the Koyokuk they always crossed the Yukon near the village of the Tananas. Always it was his medicine that filled the caches with fish. Therefore as he grew old and fat Oksook smiled and was happy.

But there came a Summer when the salmon changed the course of their run and avoided the squeaking fish-wheels of the Tananas. Farther up the river the drying-racks of the Kantishna tribe swayed under their heavy loads of oily fish. Soon Oksook's tribesmen began to murmur and criticise. Day after day he stewed and concocted strong medicines, but the dipping baskets of the wheels splashed idly and brought up nothing—a few small whitefish and grayling. When Fall came the caribou followed a new ridge north and crossed the river far above the Tananas.

The Kantishnas laughed gleefully and boasted of strong medicine as they traded their fish and meat to the Tananas for fox and beaver-skins. Now came also a noisy little missionary, who told them that Oksook's medicine was fraud and Oksook was ruined.

Thus it was that the old native became the joke of the village and an object at which the boys threw sticks and the squaws scolded when he begged for bits of meat and cast-off moccasins. Each year as he starved and became more wretched the old man grew more bitter and morose. He had long since ceased making medicine, but every morning left the village with its vicious urchins and went down the trail to Tanana where he loitered about the saloons and stores. Often he met white men who had known him when he had been famous, and sometimes they gave him money and whisky.

But this Winter promised to be long and hard and the old medicine-man felt uneasy when at night he heard the malemiuts mourn with their pointed noses toward the green sky.

ALL day it had been snowing heavily and with the darkness had come a bitter wind that sobbed down the chimneys and frightened little puffs of smoke out through the stove cracks. The big, round stove in Mickey's Place glowed in furious competition with the fiery whisky that burned the throats of Mickey's customers.

This night the talk had taken a strange turn.

Nugget Bill, a squaw-man, was speaking to the men who clustered about him in deep interest.

"Yep," he was saying, "that bunch o' Siwashes up at the village are scared to death. They heered a noise three different times last night, before the storm started, across the river on the island by the air hole, but they can't make out what it was. They said it sounded like a bull moose snortin' about twenty times as loud and jest once only at a time. A couple of young bucks went over this mornin' but she was snowin' so hard that the tracks must been all covered over. They won't any of them go over any more 'cause they've got that old hunch about spirits and that stuff."

The men all laughed boisterously. Indian superstition was always a topic of much debate and ridicule.

"Why don't they get old Oksook on the job?" laughed a big trapper. "They all used to hand it to him before the salmon went back on him."

"By the way," interrupted one of them, "where is the old boy? I haven't seen him today. They're gettin' to treat him pretty bad up there. Something ought to be done. He wasn't a bad old fellow before his medicine gave out. He's gave many a fellow a square."

"I seed him with the Scurvy Kid today," replied Bill. "Scurvy's got a stake. He and Oksook used to be pretty good friends. I guess he's gettin' him drunk."

"Wal the old boy used to pull some pretty good stuff at that. He had 'em all comin' his way for a while."

But Oksook was not drunk. He was crouching over the battered stove in his miserable cabin up at the village. A twenty dollar gold-piece given him by Scurvy still rested in his pocket. He was absorbed in gloomy reflections.

Today an old Indian had come chattering with fear to tell him of the dreadful noises that had been heard on Bull Island. The tale had puzzled Oksook, but with devilish cunning he had painted to the superstitious old buck an evil picture. No doubt it was the great *magoona* which had come to the water-hole to drink. The native knew the *magoona* to be a terrible creature. Mastodons the white men called them.

Only a few miles down the river was a high sandy bluff, known by the sour doughs as the bone-yard, from which protruded scores of gigantic bones. Often as the natives hurried by this ill-omened spot in their canoes they wondered what must have been the awful ferocity of these ponderous brutes. A *magoona* was no animal to trifle with.

From a mind inflamed with bitter resentment and years of morbid reflection, old Oksook portrayed to the shivering Indian a frightful vision of gruesome monsters stalking down from the vast unknown barrens to the north to visit disaster and death upon villages, over which the protecting influence of a medicine-man was not extended.

The old buck had slunk from the cabin to tell his fellows of this grisly thing hidden in the dense thickets across the river. With the coming of darkness the frightened villagers huddled together to spend a sleepless night.

Left alone in the hut Oksook had found it difficult to shake off the mood into which he had worked himself. What could that noise have been? He regretted that he had not heard it. Perhaps it really was some terrible creature wandered down from the wastes above the arctic rim. No man knew what the inhospitable stretches of this unexplored region contained. If only the blizzard would raise its concealing curtain of snow and cease its confusing din.

He thought longingly of the reviving whisky to be had down at Mickey's Place. But on opening the door a whirling cloud of powdery snow enveloped him and he hastily shut it again. It was no weather for an old man to be on the trail.

Not alone the Siwashes, however, were destined to be frightened by the mysterious noise this night.

Steadily the scream of the winds increased as they filled the air with hissing snow. Down on the unbroken stretch of the Yukon an inferno of flying ice streamed and roared between the high bluffs. Little life stirred abroad. Even the woolly malemiut curled his bushy tail over his nose and forgot to howl.

But there was one man on the trail who fled before the frosty hurricane and prayed that he might soon reach shelter. He was Pat Riley, the mail-driver from Fairbanks

to Tanana. He was late. The trail had been soft with drifting snow and both he and the dogs were fagged. It was with gladness that he sensed the steep sloping of the trail where it began its plunge down on to the Yukon. Two miles more and he would be at the little store which also served as Tanana's post-office.

He paused to get his bearings before making the dash across the howling confusion below. When he had gone up to Fairbanks just after freeze-up he had seen the open stretch of water near the trail. Tonight he would have to be careful because the terrific wind would tend to crowd the dogs toward the opening.

Ice had formed on his eyelashes and he drew his hands from his warm mittens to thaw it loose. Once on the river it would be a grim struggle till the other bank was reached.

"Mush Kitty."

The little malemiut straightened out the tow-line and led the team down the steep descent to the river. As the dogs and man emerged from the sheltering willow thicket that lined the beach the storm caught them and drove its stinging blasts of sharp crystals under clothing and into fur. Shrieking forces tore and buffeted them threatening every moment to fling them helpless along the wild course. The winds came not with a steady violence but seemed to crouch, to hesitate, and then hurled themselves forward with redoubled fury. During these intervals only could Riley see the bushy tail of his wheel dog. Twice he stopped the team, went forward and peered into the whirling blackness ahead; but the flying snow had obliterated the trail, and struggling low against the hurricane to regain the sleigh he cursed the fates that had left the river open.

It was Kitty who gave warning of the hole. The little leader stopped and whirled snapping upon the dog behind her. A few feet ahead was an engulfing flood into which the drifting snow sank and disappeared.

Riley staggered forward to where the black waters gushed out from beneath the heavy ice.

He stooped and patted the dog.

"Good girl Kitty. Good girl."

A slight lull had come as if the storm foiled in its design was contemplating new mischief. From across the rushing stream the moan of the storm in the spruce-trees swelled up against the wind.

Then just before the wind-sirens renewed their frenzied screaming, Riley heard a noise that sent tiny electrical shocks shooting up his spine into the roots of his hair. He seemed almost to feel it. A ghastly, surging sob through the quivering darkness from the direction of the island.

The man threw up his forearm and shrank back as if lashed at with a blacksnake. He stumbled among the malemiuts who snapped viciously from where they cowered shivering and whining.

Riley was Irish and had guts, but he also had superstitions. In all his years on the trail he had never before heard a sound like that. It was a sound of furious anguish, an unnatural sound, a terrifying sound.

"Haw—Kitty! Haw I tell yuh!" he screamed.

A stinging lash ripped time and time again into the faces of the groveling dogs. Kitty scurried frantically in a half-circle and the heavy sleigh whirled and swayed out over the jagged ridges of ice; away from that place, away from that sound.

It was near closing time in the saloon and the boisterous talk had subsided to brief monosyllables while the men shuffled and dealt the cards.

Only one or two noticed Riley's silent entry and it was not until the mail-driver had raised a shaking glass to his lips, that one of the players nudged his neighbor and said in an undertone—

"Thought Pat didn't hit the hooch any more."

As the man twisted his head to look, the remainder of the men turned their eyes toward the bar.

"Have a tough trip, Riley?" one of them inquired.

"Yeh," replied Riley shortly as he reached once more for the bottle.

The men sensed a change in his manner but did not inquire further, resuming the game somewhat reluctantly.

Soon the mail-driver came over and stood watching the game silently.

They had paused for a new deal when Riley asked very casually—

"Any you fellows been up past the island lately?"

The men glanced at one another queerly, but no one spoke until at last Nugget Bill retorted seemingly for the entire group:

"No. Why?"

"Oh—nothing. Thought I heard a queer noise as I went by tonight, but I guess it must have been the storm."

There was only the irregular clicking of fingers playing with poker-chips until Bill again spoke.

"My wife was tellin' me today that the Indians heered a noise up there last night, but they can't figure out what it was."

"It must have been the same thing I heard," returned Riley quickly. "Men, I've been in this country twenty years but I'm tellin' you this was a new one on me. Even the dogs laid down on me and wouldn't budge till I'd beat half the hide off 'em. She got my goat for a while."

"Couldn't been a moose, could it Pat?" inquired one of the men seriously after a moment of deep silence.

"No! No! I'm tellin' yuh it was different than anything I ever heard before.

It didn't sound right somehow. Kind of creepy like, but I can't describe it exactly 'cause the wind picked up right after it started."

A few moments of puzzled silence again absorbed the group. No one doubted the solemn Irishman. When a teetotaler takes to drink something had disturbed him tremendously.

With an ever-watchful eye for opportunities, Mickey, the bartender, called them up to the bar where the seriousness of the topic was manifested by a businesslike clatter of glasses.

EARLY morning came, and with a vast consumption of stimulants the origin of the disturbing noise ever increased in fantasy and supernaturalism. Nothing definite could be decided on. It was finally resolved that when the blizzard ceased, an expedition should go through the thick brush on the island and endeavor to learn the cause of this perplexing mystery. Thus the matter stood when a last round of drinks was consumed before the men shuffled off to their cabins.

Strange to say one or two wood-choppers, who lived across the river, decided to stay overnight at the little hotel.

"She'll be too cold to cut wood in the mornin'," they explained sheepishly.

But with daylight the storm grew worse. Even old French Joe, who upon any occasion could always remember a past situation of double the intensity, sat silent and awed by this terrific display of weather forces. Excursions to outlying wood-piles assumed the hardships of polar exploration. Never had such a blizzard been seen on the Yukon.

However, in spite of the mountainous heaps of shifting snow and blinding flurries that whipped over exposed portions of the trail, early forenoon saw Oksook wallowing on his ancient snowshoes down to Tanana. The burning possession of a twenty dollar gold-piece and a morbid night of superstitious wakefulness had driven him out of his gloomy cabin to seek companionship.

Upon his arrival at the little cluster of half-buried buildings he lost no time in spending part of his money for a generous bottle of bootleg whisky. Neither Indians nor half-breeds could buy liquor over the bar in Tanana, but a detour to the back door always resulted in a flaskful of a murderous concoction prepared only for natives.

The news of the fearful noises coming from Bull Island and their terrorizing effect on the Indians in the village had spread quickly among Tanana's few inhabitants. Thus because of his once having been medicine-man, Oksook found himself the object of continual banter and some ridicule.

At first he took it good-naturedly, smiling sagely to himself; but as the day wore on and he drank more and more of his flask, his good humor changed to irritation and anger which did not decrease the sport but served rather to aggravate it to mockery. This continued more or less throughout the day until evening came with its more boisterous gathering in the saloons. He retorted to his tormentors with snarls of wounded vanity until at last unable to withstand any longer the continuous attack, he staggered from a chair in the barroom where he had been sitting and shouted frantically to his revilers.

"Me show you. Me show you. Oksook he make strong medicine. He stop beeg noise on Bull Island."

With this he stumbled out into the night followed by a great hubbub of drunken jeers and laughter. Outside the door he swallowed the remainder of his liquor and crashed the bottle against the heavy logs of the building.

Even in his passion-befuddled mind he realized that he had made a fool of himself. Now because of his insane boast he would be jeered and laughed at also among the white men. With the fumes of the poisonous whisky lashing him to a frenzy of despair and anguish he bowed his head into the storm and followed a heedless direction which led him not up the trail to the village, but down on to the wind-scourged surface of the river.

No one but a drunken Eskimo could have beaten his way up against that freezing storm. He followed no straightway course, but buffeted from side to side by the blasts, slipped and floundered among the troughs of powdery crystals between the clean-swept ice-ridges. The worn webbing on his old snow shoes soon parted leaving the useless frames dangling unheeded about his knees. He did not feel the bitter winds nor suffer from the stinging particles; his mind paralyzed from the liquor served but one purpose, to impel him forward and forward.

But the tremendous heart action induced by the stimulant began to fail the old man.

Gradually his limbs commenced to shake and his pounding brain to cool. As his deadened faculties came back to consciousness he became aware of a sinister blackness close to his right. It was the open water by Bull Island. With the immunity of a sleep-walker he had been staggering along its jagged edge.

For a time he stood peering vacantly out over the murky expanse. No recollection of the terrifying mystery disturbed his half-conscious study. The waters seemed strangely soft and inviting. He felt an overpowering desire to sink into their soothing depths, out of the biting winds. There was something hypnotic about the white flakes that silently sought the dark surface to sink gently out of view.

Lurching forward he stood swaying uncertainly over the very rim. As he watched, the river appeared suddenly to rise before him. Out of the depths was emerging a black, glistening body from which a pair of luminous eyes stared malevolently.

Before he could draw back a gushing roar shook the air, beating into his ears an old familiar sound of his youth, a sound that Oksook knew and loved.

His shout of joy was drowned in a shower of freezing water.

"*Ot-si-keel*" he yelled in Eskimo. "She blows! She blows!"

It was the old rallying cry of the whale-hunt.

Then for a moment he stood silent, watching the black body as it skirted the rim, disappearing at length in the darkness. In spite of the intense cold a warm feeling of joy diffused his benumbed frame. Once more he would be Oksook, the Great Man, a man to be respected, a man to be deferred to. He must capture the great fish this very night before the secret be discovered by any one else.

How the whale happened to be so far from its natural habitat did not perplex him; his years as pilot on the lower river told him that. So preoccupied was he with his plans that on his way back across the river he did not feel the biting wind nor mind the rough going. In fact the storm seemed to be diminishing in violence.

Once in his cabin he hastily sought an old bundle brought with him when he first came among the Tananas. From it he drew a wicked looking harpoon head to which was attached a long, heavy, native whale-line. It was still in good condition. As he fitted a shaft into the barbed steel he hummed a weird old hunting-chant of his youth, the days when he had been the best harpooner of the tribe. Several times he flourished the dangerous weapon at imaginary objects and was surprized to find his arm still retained its former skill. Then arming himself with his rifle and ax he started back to the opening.

The furious winds had dwindled to a few spent whispers when Oksook again reached the place where he had seen the whale. Overhead above the scudding clouds, a flat moon disk glanced palely through ragged fringes. A dim light was diffused over the water, but the whale was nowhere to be seen.

Without waiting, however, for it to appear Oksook began to prepare for its capture. About midway between the extremities of the opening he selected near the edge a large ice chunk which he hewed down to the semblance of a stump. Around this he wound his line, leaving enough free that he might throw his harpoon a considerable distance. This done he laid his rifle and ax near and awaited his opportunity. Long years of hunting on the ice floes in the Bering stood him in good stead. With Eskimo patience he waited hour after hour for the great creature to appear. Once it rose with a high spout, but it was far over near the island, and as it sank once more Oksook wondered how long it would be before morning would bring the Indians and white men to share in the capture and thus deprive him of the sole honor.

The malemiuts in the village had begun their morning chorus when Oksook again noted the swirl in the water that betrayed the presence of his prey. It was rising near the rim and on its way up-stream would pass directly by. Closer and closer the glistening back came, gliding swiftly and easily. It would be an easy throw if his arm did not fail him.

His first nervousness was passing off. He drew back his arm tensely, leaned forward and then hurled the harpoon into the black form as it surged past. The instantaneous whip of the heavy line almost upset him, but he retained a hold on the snub end. A terrific splashing and floundering turned the whole morning into confusion. Great waves of bloody spray came lashing up on to the ice. He did not dare to let the line out

because he knew he could not pull the broad hulk up against the swift current.

Had the whale been in the prime of its strength the line would never have held, but weakened by the lack of food and the effects of fresh water, the beast could not exert its normal power and therefore soon tired.

Watching his chance, Oksook secured the line and held his rifle ready to shoot when the spray should clear. Gradually the mighty lashings grew feebler and feebler, until the waves subsiding, he saw the black hide awash. As the loud reports of the heavy caliber rifle echoed and re-echoed between the bluffs a fresh commotion shook the water, but this time it was shorter. Again the enormous body grew still and drifted over against the rim of ice. To insure his catch Oksook took his ax and sank it deep into the back, severing the giant vertebrae.

A distant shout from the village drew his attention. Down on to the white surface of the river was streaming in a black line the entire Tanana tribe.

"Oksook! Oksook! What is it?" he heard them cry.

The old man cackled grimly. He knew none of them had ever seen a fish larger than the king salmon which blundered into their fish-wheels.

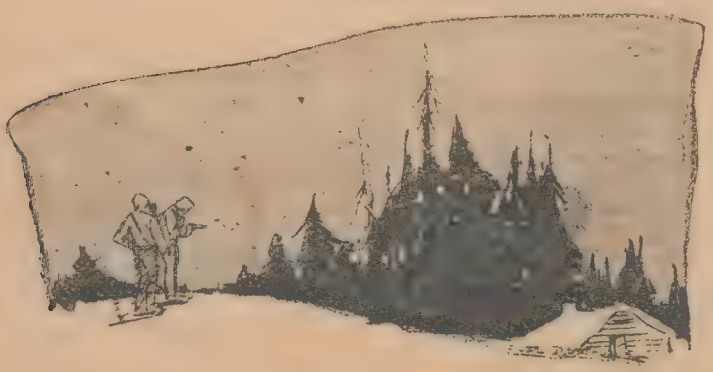
"Look!" he said calmly. "Can the Kantishnas catch fish like Oksook?"

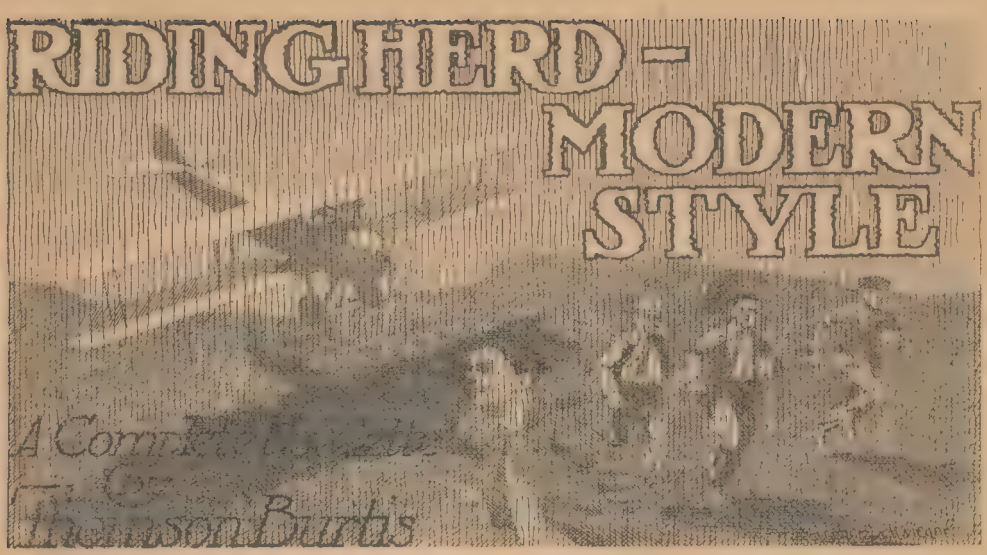
Murmurs of awe and astonishment rose from squaws and bucks alike when they saw the ferocious-looking creature that Oksook had conquered. They eyed with shudders the blood where the great tail had lashed the gory water up on the ice. Truly Oksook was a mighty man.

"Go," commanded Oksook authoritively, "and get lines to pull the fish up on the ice. I will prepare medicine for a great *potlach*," he added and turned his back upon the awe-stricken natives.

Soon came also the white men to look and wonder. Many were the speculations as to how the whale should come to be a thousand miles up the river; but it was Oksook who told his old friend the Scurvy Kid.

"Long time ago," he said, "me pilot beeg boat on lower river. When tide he back up into river, whale he come up to play and sometimes he get in front of boat. Many times we chase him long way, but when boat stop for wood he turn back. Dis Fall boats he start to burn oil, no stop for wood. Whale he come all way up."





Author of "Flying Cannon," "Groody Moves On," etc.

ONE by one the officers of the Mechanics' School at Donovan Field straggled over to the mess hall. Some of them, in fact, struggled over. A few, like Slim Evans, seemed disgustingly bright-eyed, and greeted the morn blithely. Slim, who was six feet four of loosely jointed skin and bones, sang in an enthusiastic bass voice a song regarding a merry monarch of the olden times.

The song, in a manner of speaking, was of a vulgar nature, as Slim frequently admitted. Other men, like little Al Johnson, greeted the flooding sunlight of a new Texas day with eyes yet dull with slumber plus the effects of a large night.

Hashaway Lewis, chocolate-colored cook extraordinary, kept a wary eye on the officers' quarters. Whenever one of the flyers hove into sight around the corner Hashaway took careful aim at a frying-pan with two eggs, and fired without delay.

His assistant, the totally black and entertainingly useless Taylor, hustled grapefruit, toast and coffee on the table, under Hashaway's prodding, before the prospective consumer thereof had entered the door. Taylor's claim to fame rested on the habit he had acquired of rolling a continuous row of sevens in the crap games down at the corral.

Nearly all the bachelor officers had progressed somewhat with their breakfasts when Sleepy Spears staggered in, arrayed hastily in a bath-robe that was a veteran among negligées. His square, good-natured face needed shaving, and his thick brown hair was in a tall and uncombed condition; but his eyes showed bright and clear beneath the drooping lids.

"The sun is shining—it's a wonder you even bothered to get up, Sleepy," remarked Evans, attacking his bacon and eggs with gusto.

Spears, whose perpetual lack of energy during daylight hours was proverbial, dropped into a chair, and the slow, wide grin that was the Spears trademark spread over his face.

"Had a hard night last night," he said gently.

"I'll say you did," corroborated Al Johnson, who didn't look as if his own had been so peaceful.

Spears looked hard at his grapefruit.

"Taylor, you Ethiopian reptile, you've left half the core in this thing," he stated without heat.

Taylor flashed a dumfounding double row of ivory, and carried the grapefruit back to the kitchen, chuckling delightedly. He always chuckled at Spears.

"What were you doing—studying some of those correspondence-school courses?" queried Jack Carruthers, who was head of the motor department.

"No," replied Spears, leaning a wearied head on his elbow.

In his fits of ambition, which overcame him periodically, he had invested in many pounds of books on subjects covering a very wide range. At least two of the boxes had never been opened.

"I was wooing the fair goddess," pursued Spears, critically examining the improved grapefruit that Taylor set before him.

"Which one? That blonde I saw——"

"No, the goddess of chance," grinned Spears.

The table digested this for a moment.

"Over at Field Two?" asked Slim finally.

Spears nodded.

"Started out as a poker game in Bill Black's quarters. The bunch got a little drunk and pretty soon they were playing seven-card stud with deuces and fours wild, and that stuff. Ask Al, he knows."

Johnson, who was so small that he seemed like a manikin, grinned ruefully.

"Either of you do any good?" inquired Dick Cartmell, who was charged with the duty of supervising flying at the Mechanics' School.

"I got done good," Al reported.

"I quit even," Spears said, eating his grapefruit listlessly. "The game got pretty wild—Siddell and that crowd were in it—and I was eighteen hundred ahead one time; but I lost it."

"Spe-e-a-ars! Telephone!" bawled Shotten from the quarters, a hundred yards away.

"Taylor, tell 'em I'm not at home," commanded Spears.

The grinning darky, who possibly recognized in Spears the only man in the world lazier than himself, went to the side of the mess hall, which was nothing but screening when the hinged sides of the small building were drawn up, and put his hands to his mouth.

"He say he ain't yeah!" he bawled, trailing off into a chuckle.

"Ain't here——!" bellowed the disgusted Shotten. "It's long distance!"

"It's long distance, loo-o-otinint," reported Taylor. He pronounced the first syllable with long-drawn-out unction, the others as if out of breath from his previous exertions.

Spears arose languidly and strolled down the board-walk to the quarters, his bathrobe flapping loosely around his slippered feet.

"He isn't exactly full of pep, is he?" laughed Beale, a new student officer who had just arrived to take the engineer officers' course at the school.

"Just barely gets around all day, but at night you'd be surprized," remarked Carruthers, a handsome, curly-haired chap who had been a New England intercollegiate sprint champion the year before he joined the Army.

"Seems to me that gambling must have been a little—er—steep," said Beale.

"Not for Sleepy," contradicted Evans, "or some of those other *hombres* like Siddell. They've got money—Spears has guts. He'd gather every cent he had in the world and bet you the sun would shine tomorrow or it wouldn't. What happened, Al?"

The little engineer officer shook his sleek black head sadly.

"The game got wild as ——, and I dropped, broke. Sleepy cleaned 'em up at seven-toed pete or any other thing they mentioned. He must've been all of eighteen hundred ahead about four this morning. He was the only winner. Finally Sleepy suggested to Siddell that Siddell put up his new Marmor roadster against Spears' winnings, and that they pee wee for the dice. If Spears gets 'em, he has to roll three times and hold the dice. That is, throw a natural or make his point all three times. If Siddell gets 'em he only has to throw once and either make his point or a natural. Of course the car is worth double the eighteen hundred, but that gives Siddell the edge.

"Sleepy got the dice, and he sure woke up. Threw a seven first, and then a six. So help me, he rolled twenty-three times without a six or a crap. He prayed to 'em, sang to 'em, pled with 'em and swore at 'em, and finally they sevened.

"'Oh, ——,' says Sleepy. 'Played all night and quit even!' "

Taylor's "hee! hee! hee!" could be heard above the laughter of everybody else. He stopped filling Evans' cup with coffee and slapped his thigh in delighted glee.

"Man, oh man, dat's whut Ah calls *gamblin'!*" he chortled.

Beale whistled.

"Oh, you'll get to know Sleepy if you stay here long enough," grinned Peck, another student officer who was just finishing his course. "I don't suppose you've heard about what happened to him out at May Field, in California, have you?"

Beale shook his head.

"You other fellows have, but I'll tell it again anyhow. They had a hangar out there that was so old it was no good. It was empty and the doors were always open. Sleepy used to fly a scout ship right through the darn thing every once in a while. One day the doors at one end were shut and he didn't notice it. He flew in the open end, going like ——, smashed through the doors and picked himself out of the worst cracked-up ship that ever was salvaged. How he got out alive nobody knows.

"He looked at the splinters and the hole in the hangar doors.

" 'I knew they'd do that some day,' he says, and limps off."

Once again the dusky Taylor was compelled to cease all operations to give full vent to his mirth.

"He hasn't got enough life to even get a kick once in a while, eh?" grinned Beale.

"Funny bird—the queerest specimen and the best fellow you ever met," was Evans' contribution to the discussion. "He does less work than anybody on the post, and yet the airplane department, which he runs, is the most efficient section of the school. He looks as though an oyster could beat him in a hundred-yard dash, but I've never yet seen him fail to match a job or a situation."

"Sleepy's ideal of a job may be delivering mail to the Statue of Liberty, but I saw him wake up once," stated Al Johnson, his black eyes sparkling at the recollection.

"You mean that Kannville affair?" asked Carruthers, leaning back restfully and lighting a cigaret.

Al nodded.

"He wasn't the one that made that night parachute jump and——"

"The very man," nodded Johnson.

Beale appeared to have received a body blow.

"We heard about that down on the border, but I never connected up the name. Just what was it? He had a —— of a fight, didn't he?"

"I'll say he did. He and I went down there in two ships to give an exhibition at the annual fair. Old Sergeant Correll, who went along as mechanic, got in a scrap with some of the town bums, and that night they kidnaped him and carried him off to a shack twenty-five miles away with the intention of tarring and feathering him.

"We heard about it too late to overtake 'em in a car, so we took off in a ship, Sleepy with a parachute on his back. When we got to the place Sleepy jumped, lit in a field near the cabin, and sneaked up on the bunch before the tar got good and sticky. I was flying, and wasn't supposed to land, but finally I got worried and risked landing in a strange field at night. When I reached the cabin Sleepy had four men just about licked and had never pulled his gun."

"Oh, can it, Al," came Spears' voice from outside, and in a moment his stocky form appeared in front of the screen door.

"Oh, Beale wanted to know what a roughneck you really are," grinned Al, who was Spears' room-mate.

Sleepy yawned and poured himself another cup of coffee. Apparently he had lost interest in any further remonstrance. The other flyers leaned back for an after-breakfast cigaret before going to work.

"I wonder whether the major'd let me take the LePere cross-country?" Spears inquired of the table in general.

"You're rather late—as usual—planning a trip, Ambitious," Cartmell advised him. "This is Saturday morning."

Sleepy, who habitually caught the bus to San Antonio every evening in a half-clad condition, finishing his toilet *en route*, looked reproachfully at the officer in charge of flying.

"I couldn't prophesy a telephone call, could I?"

"Oh, that's it. Where to?"

"Gonsara. They're having one of those catch-as-catch-can, free-for-all barbecues down there today. Gib Saunders, who was in the Air Service during the war, just heard I was here and called me up to come down. Any of you know him?"

"Little red-headed runt?" asked Morris, the adjutant of the school.

"Uh-huh."

"You never had life enough to follow him around, did you?"

"Oh, if somebody'll set the pace I can follow," returned Spears, his already generous mouth widening slowly into an irresistible grin.

His rather thick-set, broad-shouldered body was a study in complete relaxation.

"Well, I'll do what I can to persuade the major to O. K. it if you want to take that ball-the-jack baby," Morris offered generously. "You must plan to give the natives a thrill, don't you?"

"Oh, I thought they'd had enough Jennys land down there, and besides it takes too long to get there in a slow ship."

Slim Evans uncoiled his lathe-like form and stuck his big Stetson on the back of his head.

"They should have had the barbecue here in the front yard and saved you the trip," he remarked as he strolled toward the door.

The others arose slowly and prepared to sally forth into the sun, already hot and blinding. The roar of motors warming on the line came to their ears in a deep, far-away drone that was like the humming of some monstrous bee.

"NOW that we are left in peace, Taylor, I'll pee wee for the dice with you and then shoot you to see whether you shine my boots before I dress for nothing or double price," said Sleepy.

"Yes, *sah!*" grinned Taylor.

He put down his coffee-cup and dropped a half-eaten piece of toast, which nutriment he had been absorbing in the kitchen, and dived for his dice. He came up clicking them like an angry rattler.

Spears, still resting an elbow on the table, his head cradled in his hand, accepted the dice and threw a five. Taylor, grinning hugely, negotiated an eight.

"Mah dice, loo-o-o-tinint," he said, spitting on his hands in preparation for the roll.

Spears arose negligently and drew his faded robe closer about him.

"You get double price for the shine, Taylor," he announced plaintively, and strolled slowly toward the door.

"Why I ain't rolled yit, sah!" said the puzzled Taylor.

"You know as well as I do that you could throw a pair of dice down a flight of steps and show a seven. The boots are over in my quarters. Hop to it."

The side-splitting hilarity of the dusky Taylor followed him out of the door. He stuck one hand in his bath-robe pocket as he strolled toward the quarters, and felt something soft and folded. He pulled it out and spread it. It was a ten-dollar bill. He had no idea in the world how it had found its way into his pocket; but it was there, and he was not one to look a gift horse in the mouth. He had a habit of finding money in every pocket.

He made his way to the bath-house and shaved leisurely. The drone of the airplanes overhead reverberated inside the building as the business of Donovan Field proceeded without the aid of one Lieutenant John Spears.

The feel of the lukewarm water on him as he stepped under the shower impelled him to sing, as it always did. In a totally tuneless voice he burst forth into a verse of one of the few songs that he knew:

"I used to loop and spin with all my m-i-g-h-t,
I thought I'd be a flying star and s-t-u-n-t;
Oh, once I yearned to knock 'em dead—my good ship and m-e.
Though I was wild, thank God this child was s-a-v-e-d!"

He ceased for a moment, to add a little more cold water to the mixture. He always eased himself into a cold shower by degrees. The insistent tinny drumming of the phone reached his ears. He had an idea it was probably for him, but as the water grew colder he burst forth discordantly, though with enthusiasm, into the chorus:

"Oh, g-l-o-r-y, my friends, I was s-a-v-e-d.
I never hit the ground too hard in my good s-h-i-p;
I'd rather have white whiskers than die y-o-u-n-g;
Give other guys the glory—I'm still a-l-i-v-e!"

He turned the warm water completely off and began to dance briskly under a cold, stinging flood. During the brisk rub-down that followed, with a big, rough towel marked with the name of a prominent San Antonio hotel, he gave tongue to the song of the border-patrol flyers, who daily cover the wildest section of the country, from the Gulf of Mexico to its sister gulf on the western rim.

"Ten thousand dollars, going to the folks;
Ten thousand dollars——"

Again he became aware of the telephone and stopped singing to devote attention strictly to business. Once again clad in the tattered bath-robe, he made a leisurely progress toward the veranda and answered the insistent ringing.

"Lieutenant Spears talking," he announced, leaning restfully against the wall.

"Sergeant Correll, lieutenant. The major was just trying to get you on the phone, and I told him you'd just stepped out."

"Thanks. I'll be up in a few minutes. How'd you like to fly to Gonzara this afternoon?"

"Suits me fine, lieutenant."

"We'll start at noon if we can get a ship. Have Bitwell write a request for the LePere, will you, and say we'll be back Monday morning? Purpose of the trip, practise cross-country."

"Yes, sir."

Spears hung up and strolled into his littered quarters. The temporary signs of life he had shown under the shower had disappeared. As he cast aside his bath-robe the long, stringy muscles beneath the white skin rippled in cat-like smoothness. He lighted a cigaret, taking frequent puffs between the various maneuvers connected with arraying himself for the morning.

His room was a mass of conglomerate junk, not yet ordered by the skilful hands of Taylor and his high-yellow wife, who acted as chambermaid, her husband supervising. In one corner, covered by a brown blanket to make the bulge in the room slightly more esthetic, were two huge boxes, unopened, which held complete correspondence courses on banking and mechanical engineering respectively. The shelf above the table held two vividly red volumes authored by Boccaccio and Rabelais, a couple of technical works on airplanes, two representatives of Robert W. Chambers, the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius and a whole set of O. Henry.

On the table a pile of magazines had lost equilibrium and flooded over all available space, a *Police Gazette* having reached the floor. The beaver-board walls were covered with pictures hung without particular method. Between two of Frederic Remington's nestled a framed reproduction from *La Vie Parisienne;* and some beautiful cloud pictures, photographed from the air, disputed an entire wall with a revealing row of stage beauties.

Spears was finally ready to sally forth. He ambled slowly up the road that ran along the line of hangars, stretching for a half-mile along the rim of Field One from the bachelor quarters to the row of buildings on the northern edge, which included headquarters and the enlisted men's barracks.

A fifteen-dollar, made-to-order shirt that he wore was slightly wrinkled as a result of lying in a corner for several hours. His twenty-dollar Stetson was tilted over his eyes, dented individualistically according to a plan that suited Sleepy, although complying in no detail with the uniform regulations made and provided. The black cravat was loosely knotted, and there was a considerable interval between it and the shirt collar.

Sleepy walked along as if every step would be his last. The wide shoulders sloped as if burdened with unutterable weariness, and his arms swung loosely at his sides. It took a very close observer to notice that there was a certain effortless smoothness about that seemingly tired walk—one movement merged into the next with a panther-like effect of sinewy, rippling strength.

To his left, westward, stretched the flat, gray, two-mile square that was Donovan Field. Field One, domicile of the school that trained Air Service rookies to be trained airplane riggers, motor mechancis, parachute experts, and what not, was a half-mile long and half as wide, the eastern edge a solid line of hangars.

Separated from it by a line of unused barracks and the Rio road, Field Two lay huge and level, merging into mesquite on its western and southern sides. The northern edge was a mile and a half of big white hangars, paralleled by equally trim lines of barracks, machine-shops, store-houses and officers' quarters.

Above the field the darting little scouts of the pursuit group dodged in and out among the lazily floating billows of snowy mist that were growing ever larger as the heat increased. A thundering formation of Liberty-motored De Havilands from the bombardment group roared its majestic way above the field, its unvarying regularity testifying to the flying ability of the pilots. Handling a ton-and-a-half ship and keeping it twenty-five feet, no more and no less, from the ship ahead and in precise position in three dimensions is no task for an amateur.

Spears slowly passed the flying-department hangars. A dozen ships of different types were lined up on the edge of the field, ranging from the tiny Sopwith Camel up to a big twin-motored bomber. The mechanics, dressed uniformly in coveralls, were busily wiping down the ships in preparation for the half-holiday. Dick Cartmell waved and jeered as Sleepy made his leisurely way past the bench, and Beale, who was in helmet and goggles for a flight, grinned at him cheerfully.

The next group of hangars housed the

airplane department, where riggers were manufactured from raw youngsters who sought to learn the technique of a still new profession. Sleepy straightened his hat as he entered the first big structure, and looked around him keenly as he walked the length of it. All around were groups of students, each under an instructor, who were doing everything from doping linen to putting the final touches on a big De Haviland which that particular class had assembled and rigged.

Sleepy grinned in reminiscent complacency at the memory of the hard days of toil he had put in shaping the department so that it was self-running. The task of stealing hard-boiled old Sergeant Correll from the engineering department to act as personal representative, disciplinary non-com, and general energizer had been exhausting in itself.

The sergeant's huge, portly figure was ensconced comfortably in its wonted chair in the office as Spears entered.

"Here's that request for cross-country, Lieutenant," he said, and shoved the typewritten missive over to Spears' uncluttered desk.

Spears signed it without reading it. Two typewriters clicked busily under the flying fingers of uniformed young men who were ever mindful of the near presence of Correll.

"All the reports out?" queried Spears without particular interest.

"Signed and gone. I put my initials under your name inasmuch as you weren't here," returned Correll.

"Good. Say, better take this request up to headquarters yourself. Give it to Lieutenant Morris, and when it's approved go down to the flying department with it and see that the Le Pere is ready to go at twelve, will you?"

The sergeant snapped his finger.

"Get my hat out there on the rack," he commanded the orderly, "and stick by the phone this morning while I'm gone. I may need you."

Sleepy relaxed in his swivel chair, one foot on the desk. His eyes followed the sergeant through the window as he strode up the road toward headquarters. Ever since that night when he had made a night parachute jump and with Al Johnson's help at the end prevented a tar-and-feather party at the sergeant's expense Correll had been his right-hand man for any and all purposes. The fight had been very bothersome and had spoiled his evening in Kannville with a certain creamy blonde, reflected Sleepy, but on the whole it was well worth it.

He lit a cigaret and pushed his weirdly dented hat back on his head. He leaned forward and grasped the telephone, leaning back again as far as the chair would go. He must call up Major Stratton and tell him he had just stepped back in again, and then he'd catch up on a little slumber before the trip to Gonzara.

II

THE wicked-looking, low-hung Le Pere was the only ship left on the line at noon. With sturdy wheel-blocks under the wheels, a mechanic on each wing and another on the tail, Correll was warming up the big twelve-cylinder Liberty motor.

Sleepy waited until the soft hum of idling grew into the drumming roar which announced that it was running wide open on the final warm-up, and then left his quarters to walk the few hundred yards to the line. Correll had already been down after his suit-case, and he noted that the bag was wired on the wing, close to the fuselage. Everything was in readiness.

Correll slowly eased the throttle back until the propeller was turning slowly before he climbed out of the front cockpit. Sleepy adjusted his goggles—he wore no helmet—and stuffed cotton in his ears. It was not necessary to ask whether the motor was O. K.—Correll's silent transfer of seats told the story.

The pilot surveyed the crowded instrument-board casually as he adjusted the buckle of the wide canvas belt. Oil pressure, thirty; air pressure, three; temperature, 70° Centigrade; and voltmeter charging—all was as it should be. He nodded to the mechanics, and they jerked away the wheel-blocks.

"All ready, sergeant?" he yelled.

Correll waved assent, and Sleepy taxied up the field. The trip was a hundred and forty miles. He figured they would get there in an hour, which would be one o'clock and just the time that Gib Saunders would be expecting them.

He turned around and slowly fed the throttle. The Le Pere gathered speed rapidly, and in a second was speeding across

the ground like a bullet. Slow pressure on the stick brought the tail up, and almost before he knew it they were in the air. He held the ship close to the ground for a minute, and then lifted it upward in a beautiful zoom that brought them to three hundred feet. The air was very bumpy, and even the heavy, solid Le Pere was bounced around in the air currents as it circled the field three times, getting altitude.

At two thousand feet Spears flew over San Antonio, carefully picking out the railroads leading eastward. He verified the one leading to Gonzara by means of a small stream which his map showed running parallel to it. Five miles farther on a fork in the tracks, the southern branch leading to the Gulf of Mexico, was additional verification that he was right, so he settled back comfortably in his seat.

Usually flying was merely mechanical with him. There was no particular pleasure in it—just sitting there until he got where he wanted to go. Today, however here was a certain satisfaction in it that was unusual. The swift rush of the air past him was cool and comfortable in contrast to the baking land below, and as the Le Pere hurled itself through the misty lower edges of cloud after cloud the feel of the cool moisture was the acme of physical delight.

The Le Pere was the pride of the school—one of the only two of the type on Donovan Field. It was immeasurably faster than any other ship on the field—it could fly circles around a D. H., and left Fokkers, S. E. 5s and even the powerful little 220 Spad hopelessly out of the running.

Like a majority of the American flyers, it was a distinct event for Sleepy to get his hands on a real ship. He had not flown anything but frail, clumsy De Havilands or rebuilt British and German scout planes for so long that flying renewed its joy for him as he surveyed the trim, strong wings, without dihedral or overhang, and the solid laminated fuselage, so different from what he had been accustomed to since leaving France.

Obeying a sudden impulse, born of his whole-souled flyer's delight in flying an honest-to-goodness ship for once, he throttled the motor and nosed down. The strongly built ship would stand it almost as well as a Spad, so he allowed the air-speed meter to go up to a hundred and eighty miles an hour the while he carefully handled the throttle until, despite their terrific speed, the 450 horse-power Liberty was only turning fifteen hundred revolutions.

Like a meteor the big black-and-white ship shot toward the sun-drenched earth two thousand feet below. It was a smiling country of alternate flat cotton-fields and small patches of mesquite, splotched with shadow as the snowy cumulus clouds drifted across the sun.

Correll, in the black cockpit, leaned over anxiously and treated the instrument-board, which he could see from his seat, to a careful inspection. There was nothing wrong there, and the motor was certainly firing evenly and without missing, so the portly mechanic leaned back again and devoted all his attention to blowing out his ears to keep the change in pressure from deafening him. Every few seconds he grasped his nose firmly, kept his mouth closed, and blew hard, Spears following his example as they sped ever nearer the ground.

They were diving parallel with the railroad, and at two hundred feet Sleepy gradually came out of the dive, easing the throttle on slowly as he came level. At fifty feet, directly over the railroad, the ship was flying in normal position, the motor turning 1550.

Spears leaned forward and opened the shutters, which he had closed for the dive to keep the motor from cooling too fast. Then he settled down to fly the railroad—every curve of it.

At a hundred and forty miles an hour, a few feet above the wires, the Le Pere roared its way down the railroad. The sensation of speed, almost indiscernible a thousand feet or more high, was now paramount.

The little town of Carston heard the ever increasing roar of the motor, and stirred from its midday lethargy to sweep the sky with languid interest. It grew into astonished wonder as a black-and-white meteor shot across the housetops, the tiny railroad station and on down the railroad so swiftly, "Here she comes!" followed by, "There she goes!" were about the only comments a reasonably intelligent and quick-witted person could encompass before the Le Pere was gone.

Sleepy, his attitude still relaxed as he guided the mighty machine beneath him, was smiling slightly, and the lazy gray eyes were glowing softly. It was the kind of

flying that has killed many a pilot, for chances of a crack-up in case of motor failure were very promising. However, it was the expression of a spirit without which there would never have been a conquest of the air; scientists may experiment, but some one must take a chance.

Ten minutes of flashing progress along the shining steel rails left the motor at 80° Centigrade—not too hot. A stretch of big, level cotton-fields on his right tempted Sleepy to bank away from the railroad. He dropped down to five, and skimmed the tops of the cotton plants.

When he reached a fence a tiny zoom took him over it. A cluster of houses loomed ahead, and with a world of excess speed he lifted the Le Pere in a smooth, curving zoom that cleared the houses by a hundred feet. He dropped down again for a wild rush across a straight half-mile of waving corn.

A BIG, level stretch of closely cropped grass showed ahead. Thirty or more horses and mules were grazing in it. Sleepy obeyed a sudden impulse and dived along the eastern edge of the field, close to the fence. A dozen of the animals who were occupying that section kicked up their heels and departed hastily. Zooming up at the other end of the field, Sleepy noted that one mule had not retreated far enough, so he shot down and herded the recalcitrant beast into the main bunch, along the western boundary.

This accomplished, he circled back of the field a few hundred yards, slowly cut the throttle, and stalled over the fence, landing smoothly on three points. With a few quick thrusts of gas he turned around, taxied back to the fence, and pointed the nose down the field in preparation for the take-off.

"What's the trouble, lieutenant?" inquired Correll anxiously.

"Just wanted a smoke," returned his chief, stretching mightily as he reached the ground.

The sergeant took a full minute to digest this information. He grinned as he looked at Spears, now puffing contentedly as he lay on the ground.

"Must be—er—feeling pretty good today, lieutenant," he ventured.

"Oh, not so bad, not so good," replied Spears airily. "Light up—we haven't got much time."

The ship was idling softly. The airmen lay restfully on the ground, undergoing the severe inspection of the horses and mules, who had retired to the farthermost limits of the big field.

Spears moved a trifle to get in the breeze generated by the propeller, and then moved back again with a grunt of disgust as he noted that he would lose his cigaret if he remained there. He lay motionless, his arm over his eyes to keep out the blinding radiance of the noon-high sun.

When he had inhaled the last possible supply of smoke from his diminutive cigaret-stub he sat up, yawned, and put on his goggles. Correll threw away his smoke and climbed in the rear. In a moment they were roaring across the field, taking the air before its length was half-covered.

They flew straight down the railroad, climbing gradually, until once again they felt the cool air under the clouds against their faces. Spears shook the stick, and Correll leaned forward. Spears cut the motor for a moment as he yelled—

"You fly it!"

Correll nodded with much satisfaction. He could keep a ship level in the air all right, and took great delight in an opportunity to demonstrate his ability. Spears passed his map back to the mechanic, and with his finger indicated their precise position. Correll nodded his comprehension.

Spears settled deeply into his seat, so far behind the wind-shield that he scarcely felt any of the terrific air pressure compounded of their speed and the propeller's blast. The motor was running well within its possibilities at fifteen hundred revolutions. His arms rested limply on the cowling, and his eyes gazed calmly on the clouds drifting just above them. The roar of the motor, with its hypnotic monotony, lulled him into drowsiness and in a moment, sleep.

For a wonder he awakened just before they arrived at Gonzara. Sergeant Correll was just deciding that it was time to lean over and shake the pilot when Spears stirred and looked around. As they came over the fairly large town he saw a railroad crossing and recognized Gonzara. His wrist-watch showed 1:10.

He was familiar with the landing-field, and quickly picked it up. The wide-spreading grove next to it—the location for the barbecue—was swarming with tiny, ant-like specks, and the smoke of the barbecue

fires, rising almost straight in the air, provided a good wind-vane. Evidently there was practically no wind on the ground, such as there was being from the south. The field itself ran north and south, which made it as convenient as could be wished for landing.

Correll had climbed to five thousand feet on the way. Spears took the stick and pulled it back as far as it would go, applying left rudder at the same time. The nose came up until the ship was almost perpendicular in the air, and then fell off to the left in a whirling dive. Spears cut the motor half-way—he did not throttle fully because that would foul the spark-plugs, and it was very possible that he would need a good motor before making his landing.

The heavy Le Pere, with a thousand-pound motor in its nose running half-open, screwed downward in a terrific vertical tail-spin. Four hundred feet a turn, and the turns came so fast it was almost impossible to count them.

Sleepy watched the ground calmly, occasionally blowing out his ears for comfort's sake. He kept an eye on the altimeter, which was wabbling crazily in an effort to keep up with the rushing loss of altitude.

Every wire was screaming with the speed, and Correll, experienced passenger though he was, was dizzy and sick as the big, flashily painted ship corkscrewed through the last thousand feet. Sleepy grinned slowly as he caught kaleidoscopic views of the crowd below, now motionless.

"Some of 'em are getting the roofs of their mouths sunburnt," he reflected as he jammed on right rudder and pushed the stick forward.

A turn more, and the Le Pere straightened out in a vertical dive. It took four hundred feet before the nose started coming up as Sleepy eased the stick back slowly. It was not so easy to do against the force of the wind on the elevators.

Three hundred feet above the ground the ship was level, and the motor came full on as Spears circled the long, narrow landing-field, eying it closely for possible ditches or crack-brained onlookers who might be in the way. Satisfied that Gib Saunders, or some one equally wise, was warning the crowd to keep away, he made a wide circle and approached the field in a slow dive from the north.

"Slow" in a Le Pere means around ninety miles an hour. The throttle crawled back by degrees until it was idling as the ship sped over the trees and dropped down until it was two feet above the ground. Knowing the gliding propensities of his ship, Sleepy kicked the rudder and sent the plane into a skid that helped kill their speed. They were less than fifty yards from the end of the field when they stopped rolling.

As he taxied toward the western edge of the field, which was packed with people who had temporarily deserted the barbecue, the pilot spied a dancing figure in the foreground that he recognized readily. Even at that distance there was no mistaking the red hair and somewhat portly form of ex-Lieutenant Gib Saunders.

Sleepy taxied toward Saunders, stopping a few feet in front of the crowd that poured out behind the one-time pilot.

"Burn out the motor; will you, Correll?" requested Spears.

Correll climbed into the front seat and turned off one of the gas pet-cocks as Sleepy tumbled off the wing into the flailing arms of Saunders.

"Not so vigorous, Gib, not so vigorous," Spears cautioned with his widest grin as his freckle-faced, bright-eyed comrade of overseas days seemed bent on knocking the life out of him with tremendous thumps on the back. "These folks don't know whether this is a fight or merely an exhibition, you red-headed firebrand!"

"Nor is it any of their business," returned Saunders. "I could see by the way you got out o' that ship—which is a beauty, by the way—that you haven't got any more life in you than you used to have."

"Not in Texas anyhow. Of all the stewing, fly-bitten, deserted——"

"Don't say another word. I hate to beat up a guest," warned Gib, whose monologs anent his beloved State were well remembered by Spears.

Saunders led him through the curious, ever-growing crowd that had already surrounded the ship.

"Sure that big mechanic can 'tend to everything?" queried the Irishman as they threaded their way through.

"Anything he can't 'tend to would be far beyond me," grinned Sleepy.

"In that case we'll hop into the car here and get dad. He had to be at the bank this morning. Mary's around here somewhere,

but you can meet her later. What about your suit-case?"

"Oh, we can bring that in later. I refuse to wear a blouse until evening."

"Good. I've got a guard for your ship, so your mechanic will be free. Hop in and we'll jazz down-town and right back."

The big touring-car left a cloud of dust as Saunders sped townward, his tongue going nearly as fast as his car while he tried to cover two years in ten minutes.

III

AT 12:15 P.M. Mr. Daniel Saunders, genial cashier of the Gonzara bank, let himself into his house to prepare for a descent on the festivities of the afternoon. The house was deserted, every other member of the family having left for the fair-grounds long before.

Mr. Saunders had barely applied himself to the lunch left for him on the kitchen table when the door bell rang.

"Come in!" roared the banker.

Gonzara was a small and easy-going town, every inhabitant of which was personally known to him.

A tall, well-dressed stranger let himself in, and walked down the hall which led to the kitchen. The open door of the kitchen allowed Mr. Saunders to observe the progress of his guest, and he arose with an apology.

"I thought it must be some of the neighbors," he said with an unembarrassed smile.

The smile faded as he looked into the business end of a Colt .45.

"Listen, and listen close," said the stranger, whose face was minus the tan of the native Texan. "You're going with me to the bank. I'll have you covered every minute from my pocket. When we get there you'll open the vault. Get your coat on."

His words were staccato and strictly business-like, and the impression he made was undramatic. However, there was a certain strength of purpose and cold resolve apparent that caused the amazed cashier to put on his coat without a word. Temporarily he was incapable of connected thinking.

The tall stranger, who looked to be about thirty-five, followed Saunders out of the door. A big black touring-car, holding two men besides the driver, was drawn up in front of the house. The men were all smoking, and their attitudes were easy and untroubled. The chauffeur started the motor as they appeared at the door.

"If we meet anybody that speaks to you, answer them naturally, do you understand?" said the stranger in conversational tones as they walked down to the car.

His right hand was in his coat pocket.

Mr. Saunders nodded mechanically. A quick look up and down the quiet, shaded street showed only three or four people, all of them some distance away.

He and his captor took seats in the tonneau. The man who shared it with them was stout and cold eyed, and was smoking a big cigar. All of them were inconspicuously dressed, and all had a young-old look, their faces showing deep lines around the mouth and hard eyes.

As the car drove toward the bank at moderate speed Mr. Saunders was ever conscious of the pressure of a gun at his side.

"Act natural, and keep your eyes open for anybody you ought to speak to," ordered the tall man once more as they approached the town square.

"Any trouble sfaring him, Joe?" inquired the man who shared the front seat with the driver.

"Not a bit. Caught him with his mouth full."

Mr. Saunders had had a wild hope that perhaps on the drive through the square it might be possible to arouse some one's suspicions, but the robbers took a roundabout route that brought them up to the bank without going through the main part of town. The bank was located only a few steps from the square, on a side street leading from it.

The car drew up in front of the small brick structure, and the chauffeur calmly stopped the motor. The thing was satanically audacious, and yet well planned, reflected the unhappy cashier despairingly. Ninety per cent. of Gonzara's population were out at the fair-grounds for the big annual jubilee commemorating the founding of the town, and there were so many visitors from other towns that strangers aroused no comment.

"Hop out, and don't waste a minute. If we meet anybody, I'm Mr. Smith, an old friend of yours. This other fellow is a friend of mine. And don't kid yourself that we'll hesitate to pump you full of holes if you squeal."

The stout man accompanied his accomplice and the cashier into the bank. Mr. Saunders unlocked the front door in a daze and let them in.

"Pull up the window and door curtains," commanded the tall man, whom the others addressed as Joe.

His stout comrade in crime took up his station by the door, leaning easily against the wall and peering through a crack in the curtain. The men in the car smoked calmly, although their hard eyes unobtrusively watched the infrequent stragglers that passed across the street a few steps ahead, where it led into the square.

"Open that vault quick. We know the lay of the land, so don't stall," said Joe briskly, his gun out of his pocket once more.

The Gonzara bank was small, and it had not reached the point yet where complicated time-locks and other safety features had been incorporated into its equipment. With a heavy heart the cashier silently set to work. He watched helplessly while more than twenty thousand dollars went into the traveling-bag that the stout man carried.

It was doubly unfortunate that the bank should have an unusual amount of cash on hand. It was ginning-season, and the Gonzara cotton-growers had deposited a lot of money during the last few days.

"Close everything up, and then let down the curtains," said the tall man as the other thief strolled nonchalantly down the steps and into the car.

Mr. Calvin Burton, a gentleman of color who was accustomed to do odd jobs for Mr. Saunders, passed by the bank as the cashier was letting down the shades to their accustomed position when the bank was closed. Passers-by had free view of the interior when it was closed, but the big shades were raised to keep out the sun when the bank was open. Mr. Burton was on his way to the barbecue, and yelled a cheerful, "Afternoon, sah!" as he passed.

"Answer!" came in a deadly whisper from Joe, who was playing a light conversational part for the benefit of passers-by.

One would have thought that he and the cashier were close friends indulging in cheerful small-talk.

Mr. Saunders forced a wave and a smile. Apparently Calvin did not think it peculiar that the cashier should be at the bank so late, for he passed on, whistling cheerily, vouchsafing the car and its occupants a glance of only perfunctory interest.

"Now you're going to take a little ride with us," stated Joe as his captive silently locked the door.

He could scarcely grasp the situation even then—it seemed like a dream somehow that he should be forced to help rob the bank. He simply could not comprehend it. At Joe's last words he came to life with a snap.

"Where to?"

"Just out in the country a little ways where you'll be safely out of the way till Monday."

"I might just as well let you shoot me as be suspected of conniving at this outrage!" blazed Mr. Saunders.

They had stopped at the door of the car.

"Climb in, you —— fool," snarled the chauffeur, a thin-faced man wearing a linen duster.

"We can club you over the head and make you go," snapped Joe. "If it'll comfort you any, you'll be tied up tight, with plenty of food and water to last till you're found."

Mr. Saunders took a last despairing look up toward the square. The irony of it entered his soul as he saw George Hardwick, who owned a drug-store, drive his car past the street on his way to the barbecue.

Even if the bluff Hardwick had turned around, however, he could have done nothing but wave, for Joe's gun could be felt through the pocket as the tall, impressively cool crook pressed close to him. He silently climbed into the car, which turned around in a leisurely way and rolled off down the street well within the speed laws.

IV

"THAT'S funny. The house is unlocked, but where is dad?"

Saunders had shouted for his father without result. Spears dropped into a chair.

"Maybe he caught a ride out to the celebration," he suggested.

"He wouldn't have left the house unlocked," objected Gib. "Maybe he forgot it, though. We'll wait around a while and see whether he went over to some of the neighbors for something. His lunch was only half-eaten."

The two friends sat and smoked while Gib tried to draw out Spears as to what had happened to him during the last two years. Sleepy had been assigned to the border patrol for a while, around Calexico and Yuma, working mainly out of San Diego. Saunders' eyes glistened as he listened to the very few things that Spears could be prevailed on to tell about the doings of the Air Service.

"I sure wish I was back sometimes," he said wistfully, his good-humored face regretful. "But it looked like too good a chance to miss here at the mill. Of course I'm making money, but——"

"Ambition is the curse of young men," stated Sleepy. "Why grub until you're fifty for a hundred thousand that you've forgotten how to enjoy?"

Gib grinned and glanced at his watch.

"Good Lord, it's two o'clock. I guess dad must have gone to the barbecue with somebody and forgotten to lock the door. Let's go."

Out at the grove inquiries failed to locate Mr. Saunders. The puzzled Gib finally spotted Mr. Calvin Burton, arrayed like the lilies of the field, and escorting a dusky belle with much *éclat*.

"Oh, Cal, you haven't seen dad around here, have you?"

"Nossah. I seed him down to the bank 'bout a hour ago."

"At the bank? For the love of ——"

"Yessah. They was a man in there with 'im, and a car was sittin' out front, yessah."

"Jack, that's kind of funny," stated Saunders. "Let's hunt up Mr. Sears. Maybe he can tell us— By gorry, when we asked him whether he'd seen dad he didn't say anything about his being at the bank late for any special reason, did he?"

"No, he didn't," agreed Sleepy.

They rushed around through the milling crowd until they espied the tall, thin, weather-bitten old-timer who looked less like a bank president than a cowboy. As a matter of fact in his younger days he had been a rider, not so many miles from Gonzara either.

"Mr. Sears, do you know why dad was at the bank so late today? Cal said he saw him there about one o'clock. He was to wait for me at the house, but I can't find him anywhere."

"Why, no, son, I don't," drawled the banker, who was taking it easy under the trees in the company of some cronies. "What did he appear to be doin'?"

"I don't know. Cal said there was a man in the bank with him, and a couple more out in front in a car."

A small, bright-eyed man whose "store-clothes" did not quite hide his bowed legs had been listening casually. At Gib's last words he looked up quickly.

"Who were the men, did Cal say?"

"He didn't know 'em," returned Gib, an uneasy premonition of wrong sweeping over him.

"Any bank-robberies being pulled around here?" inquired Sleepy suddenly.

The quiet question acted like an electric shock on the little gathering.

"Gib, get that Cal nigger and bring him here *pronto*," ordered the bright-eyed little man, who was county sheriff.

Young Saunders departed rapidly on his hunt.

"Tom, you don't mean to tell me you think the bank has been——"

"Sears, you know what happened over to Caryville last week, don't you? It pays to be sure."

The tanned, somewhat stooped banker wiped his face with a huge handkerchief.

"I'm goin' to see right now," he declared, rising to his feet.

"Let's wait a couple o' minutes for Cal. I'll go with you then. The nigger may be able to tell us some more."

In a moment Cal appeared in Saunders' company. He was unable to add any more to the story. He had not noticed the men especially, but was sure he did not know any of them. His description of the car was vague. All he knew was that it was fairly big and that there were two men in it and another one, very tall, in the bank with the cashier.

The sheriff and Mr. Sears set off in the banker's car to investigate. The rumor had spread, and a continuous stream of men approached Gib and Spears asking eagerly for information. In a few minutes a considerable crowd of Gonzara citizens were standing around with Saunders, waiting for the return of the sheriff and Sears.

They did not have long to wait. In fifteen minutes the big car came booming down the road at a speed so far in excess of Mr. Sears' customary conservative driving that Gib's heart sank.

"Every nickel of cash gone from the

vault!" yelled the sheriff as the car skidded to a halt. "Every —— one o' you fellows are sworn in right now!"

The little man raised his hand for silence as a storm of questions assailed him.

"I've got to send off a bunch o' wires right away. I want every available car to get filled up and start out all the roads after 'em. If——"

"Maybe some one here saw which way the car went," suggested Sears, who was pulling nervously at his scraggly mustache.

"Anybody here just arrive? If so did they notice a black five-passenger car leavin' town with four—or mebbe five, if they kidnaped Saunders——"

The fiery little sheriff stopped for a moment and then smote his opened hand with his fist.

"By the Mighty, that's what they done! They carried off Saunders to prevent an alarm. See it? They get three or four hours start anyway before Saunders is missed, mebbe more. Then it's longer yet, mebbe till Monday, before the robbery is known. Just the accident o' Gib here goin' home after the old man——"

"I believe you're right!" declared Sears excitedly, and a buzz arose from the packed crowd that surrounded the group of men.

"Anybody here see a car leavin' town?" demanded Sheriff Metcalfe.

A big, raw-boned, sombreroed fellow spoke up from the rear.

"I passed one full o' men on the San Antone road," he drawled. "Didn't notice 'em special, though."

"Probably them," declared Metcalfe, whose puckered, gray eyes were flashing fire.

Gib Saunders' face was very serious as he listened. The thought of his father in the hands of the thieves, and what might happen to him, had suddenly changed the merry young Gib into a flaming-eyed, thin-lipped Texan who would be a distinct factor in anything that might come up. Sleepy looked at him sympathetically, and then his gaze returned to the sheriff, who was talking rapidly.

"There's just three roads they'd be liable to take, specially figurin' on havin' a lot o' time for the getaway. That San Antone road is one of 'em. That splits thirty miles up at Torbard—no tellin' which one they'd take. ——"!

"How far apart do the roads run? I mean, when that road splits do the two forks run within twenty miles or so of each other for a while?"

It was Sleepy's voice, with a subtle change in the timbre of it that caught Gib's attention. The crowd looked curiously at the aviator.

"Why, yes. They don't get further'n twenty miles apart for a good piece, not till the south road bends due south to Corpus. But——"

"Here's what I was thinking," proceeded Sleepy calmly. "I can take my plane up, and overtake that car in an hour at the most, covering both roads. If somebody has some field-glasses I can do it in less, because by flying between them we can nearly see both roads at once. When I spot which road they're on—I can make pretty certain by diving low and looking them over—I can fly back to the automobiles with the posse and signal them which road they're on. Then I can fly back over them, and go on to the next town. If there's a field I can land in I can maybe get a bunch of men out to stop 'em. Anyway——"

"By ——!"

The little sheriff slapped his leg in exultation. An excited murmur came from the crowd, which now included hundreds of people, as the possibilities of the scheme were realized.

"And I'll go along with a rifle in the back seat—I'm used to flying," Gib cut in, his eyes flashing with eager hope.

The sheriff set to work immediately. In less time than it takes to tell it cars were dispatched to town after high-test gas for the plane, field-glasses from Mr. Sears' house, and a supply of rifles and revolvers from divers homes. The roar of the airplane motor, which Correll was warming up before the advent of the gas to save time, was a constant and exciting reminder to the crowd of what was to come.

The only calm human being at the barbecue was Lieutenant John Spears, who was in semi-hiding behind an isolated tree, in Gib's company, to avoid being bothered with questions. The pair did not appear publicly, so to speak, until the cars had returned from town with the needed supplies. As they left their quiet retreat and approached the surging mob around the ship, now silent as Correl quickly filled it with gas, Sleepy looked at his red-headed friend with a slow grin.

"I'm sure your dad is all right, Gib—just in hiding, so to speak, or on the way to be hid for a couple o' days. So let's enjoy ourselves, eh?"

Somehow his quiet confidence was infectious.

"You've said it!" declared Gib.

V

THREE thousand feet high the big Le Pere boomed along the San Antonio road. It was three-thirty, and according to Cal's story the robbers had almost three hours start. Probably about ninety miles, reflected Spears, unless something had happened. Saunders knew every foot of the country, and had said that there were no side roads that the thieves would be likely to take.

They came to the fork in the road, and Sleepy guided the plane squarely down the middle line between the two. For fifteen miles ahead the roads were not more than ten miles apart, the gap between them gradually widening.

They had sighted only two cars driving along the way they were traveling, both very small ones. They had played safe and dropped earthward for a close look. The country was not thickly settled, and such traffic as there was, which was small, was toward Gonzara and not away from it.

Saunders was watching the right-hand road, and Spears the left. They had traversed about fifteen miles on a line between the two when Gib reached over and shook the pilot. He pointed down to a tiny speck traveling along the road, toward San Antonio.

Sleepy nodded and nosed down. He did not believe it was their car. He figured that to be several miles ahead. What he did not figure on was the stop the desperadoes had made on a side road to chain Mr. Saunders securely in a deserted shack, where they had left him with sufficient food and water to last three days.

They were a thousand feet high when they caught the car, and as he circled over it Sleepy noted that it was large and black and traveling fast. The country underneath was mostly mesquite, although isolated cleared spots could be seen.

The Le Pere, under his handling, was skimming the tops of the trees several hundred yards back of the car. Sleepy flew parallel to the road, as low as possible, and throttled the motor slightly as they shot past. There were several men in the car, that was certain.

Gib, a long-barreled rifle in his hand, leaned over the rear cockpit as far as he could stretch, trying his utmost to identify some one in the car. They flashed by so fast, however, that they could come to no conclusion.

Spears turned the throttle full on, and circled back once more. He could scarcely believe that was the car, and yet it might be. Certainly the passengers had craned their necks to the utmost to watch them; but that would be only natural for anybody to do in view of the low flying he was doing.

On the next trip past the car the thieves gave themselves away. Probably it was the sight of Gib's rifle, and the fact that the circling of the plane denoted suspicion. As the two flyers shot by, their heads turned as they strained their eyes toward the car, they saw two revolvers spit flame at them.

Gib's face was alight with exultation, and his eyes flashed fire through the big goggles. The shots did not bother them particularly—a fast moving plane is about as difficult a target as there is extant.

Sleepy pointed backward, and Gib nodded. The map showed that the road was without cross-cuts for twenty miles—by the time the car covered that they could be back again after signaling the posse coming behind.

With motor turning eighteen hundred and speedmeter showing a hundred and forty miles an hour the Le Pere sped back over the trail. It took less than fifteen minutes to reach the three speeding automobiles that held the sheriff and his deputies. The Le Pere turned around, flew straight for a moment, and then banked steeply to the right. It was the agreed-upon signal to indicate which road the bandits had taken.

The flyers wasted no time, but went swiftly back on their way. They found the car speeding along the road, plainly making every effort to get where they were going as fast as might be practicable. The Le Pere passed it five hundred feet high, and flew on ahead. The next town was fifteen miles up the road, and was only a hamlet.

They were perhaps five miles ahead of the car when they struck a very large cleared spot, extending at least three hundred

yards on each side of the road. It was a corn-stubble field, mowed closely, and what looked to be a partially broken-down shack was in one corner.

Gib shook Sleepy energetically, and pointed down. He motioned to it with his rifle. Sleepy nodded, his eyes glowing beneath the drooping lids and his face all a-grin at what he conceived to be Gib's idea. He dipped over the field, ascertaining that the furrows were shallow and that the stubble was very short, and then circled back a few hundred yards for his landing.

There was plenty of room, but he stalled down across the mesquite and landed, leaving space enough for a take-off from where the plane stopped. Gib had unfastened his belt before the plane stopped, and was out in a flash.

"I can get up there behind a tree or something, and pop their front tires," he said quickly, his freckled face ablaze with excitement.

"Can you shoot that well?" enquired Sleepy doubtfully.

"Born and brought up in Texas, boy," stated Saunders. "You take off and keep in touch with the posse. I could get every one of them from behind my tree if they started to rush me when I put their car out of commission. If you stay here the plane will warn them before they get near enough for me. They could scatter in the mesquite then and make the deal a lot more difficult."

Sleepy nodded his acquiescence, and shoved on the throttle without delay. There was plenty of room, and he cleared the mesquite on the other side without trouble. Below him he watched Gib's somewhat stout form scurry across the field and dive into the woods at the farther end.

He kept the Le Pere circling above the field at about five hundred feet, waiting to see what would happen. He took time to look over his instruments closely. The oil pressure had dropped to twenty-two—the oil had not been renewed since leaving Donovan. However, that was all right, for Sleepy knew the Liberty was good for another two hours of flying on the oil supply. Air pressure was correct at three, and the tachometer showed the motor turning a good fifteen-fifty. Centigrade temperature was 87°—too hot, due to the low flying. Sleepy throttled the motor to fourteen hundred—as low as would keep the Le Pere level—and opened the motor shutters the final notch.

In a moment he saw the car approaching, going like mad. He tilted up his ship in a shallow bank, his eyes on the ground below him. The car was a quarter of the way across the big clearing when he saw it lurch suddenly. A hundred yards more and it stopped on the edge of the ditch.

Sleepy grinned slowly. Apparently Gib was strictly on the job. He saw flashes of flame as the bandits returned the fire, but there was no answering shot from the woods as far as he could see. Undoubtedly Gib was holding his fire for fear of hitting his father.

Four men clustered behind the car. Evidently Mr. Saunders was not there. He wondered where the banker was. Possibly they had bound and gagged him in some nook of his own house, he reflected.

Suddenly his eyes narrowed and the wide mouth tightened. The four men were making a break for the woods on the opposite side of the clearing from where Saunders was hiding.

In a flash he saw the fatal mistake he and Gib had made. By running on a course that was a continuation of an imaginary line made by Saunders and the car, they could use the car as a partial screen all the way. When they reached the woods they could circle around, using the trees as protection, and shoot Gib from the rear. He would be totally helpless against four men spread out in the woods behind him. Their only chance for escape, and that a slim one, was to change their tires without being under fire. In all probability they were desperate enough to take any chance that offered even the slimmest of opportunities to escape.

ALMOST before these thoughts had raced through Sleepy's head he had nosed his ship down in a straight dive, motor wide open. The bandits were less than fifty yards from the car as he came roaring across the field, not a foot above the ground, and headed straight for them.

The Le Pere was a thing of terrible power as it hurled itself across the ground, and the bandits turned and ran back toward the car. The purpose of the pilot was very evident to them.

With a grin Sleepy thanked his stars that they did not know how fatal it would be to him if he really hit them. It would assuredly break his propeller and pile him up against the trees at the edge of the clearing.

No sooner had he gone past them than he lifted his ship in a beautiful climbing turn that was almost a wing-turn. The ship was practically stalled at the peak of it, but headed back the way it had just come. It settled earthward, picking up speed as it dropped until it was once more speeding across the ground, nearer the car this time. The bandits had stopped when it went past, but as it returned they scurried the rest of the way back to the car.

Once again Sleepy performed the same maneuver. If there was any flyer at Donovan Field who doubted Spears' flying-ability, a grand-stand seat that day would have settled his doubts. Wing-turning a Le Pere from a foot off the ground is a maneuver that leaves the pilot only a few feet between himself and a bad crash. Stalling the slightest bit too much at the top of his climbing turn would mean a straight drop to the ground, for there was not altitude enough to gain flying speed after it was once completely lost. At best it was necessary almost to pick the ship off the ground as it settled after the turn.

Twice more they tried to make a run for it. The second time one man flopped face down to the ground. Like a flash Sleepy nosed down a bit more, trying to hit him with the wheels. In all probability it would not hurt him badly, but it would certainly scare him effectually. His idea was simply to bounce his wheels off the man's back.

He did not succeed, but with a grin he reflected that he had not come far away, for the man's body had disappeared beneath the wing. The man started to get up as Sleepy passed, to be knocked down by the propeller blast. He dived for the car without delay, and for ten minutes there was no further attempt at making the woods. It looked very peaceful down there—the field stretching big and smooth in the sunlight, four men clustered quietly around the car, and the mesquite giving no sign of the deadly rifleman within its cool-looking green shelter.

One of the bandits showed himself incautiously beside the car. As Sleepy watchfully patrolled low over the mesquite he saw the man grab his arm and leap back behind the shelter of the auto. A thin wisp of smoke arose from the mesquite. It was lucky that the bandits apparently had only revolvers as weapons, thought the pilot.

Suddenly he nosed down at full throttle. All four men were making another attempt to cross the clearing. For a moment he lost sight of them as the top wing hid them in the steepness of the dive. As he roared across the ground they retreated near the car, and flashes of fire from four revolvers could be seen plainly. They shot continuously.

As he passed them he felt a shattering impact in his shoulder. The plane wabbled for a moment and veered perilously as the pilot felt the searing pain of the bullet. With an effort that left him faint he straightened the ship as the wing-skid dragged the ground, and held it level for a moment. He lifted it over the trees and banked around.

The lucky shot had left his right arm almost paralyzed. Every bump that hit the ship caused him excruciating pain. He had only one hand to handle both stick and throttle. The blood was slowly staining through his shirt, and he could feel it trickling down his body.

Three times more, at intervals of a few moments, the men below tried to outwit him. Each time the roaring Le Pere, speeding toward them as they started, sent them back. Apparently they had no doubt of the pilot's intention to hit them. With his face white under the tan, and his body weakening rapidly as the slowly gushing blood drained it of strength, Sleepy fought to retain consciousness.

Of all the tragedies that happen in flying, ninety per cent. start within ten feet of the ground. An error in leveling off—hitting an obstruction in landing—slipping into the ground trying to bank too close to it—those are the things that kill pilots. Spears, forcing himself to keep clear-headed and conscious by main force of will, time and time again wing-turned off the ground to rush back across the field before his prey could escape.

Never a time did that terrific dive last a split-second too long and send the Le Pere head-on into the earth, nor did it falter and drop as it climbed and turned together, to be ready for the next dive. Twice he deliberately tried to move his right arm, so that the agony of it would help him fight

off the faintness that threatened to master him.

He had no conception of the passage of time. The motor was running wide open—he was too close to the ground to risk taking his one good hand from the stick to cut it.

A seductively dangerous languor came over him. It seemed useless to keep watching the men below—they had not made an attempt to break for the woods in some time. It was so silly and futile to go to all this trouble.

He banked mechanically. For a moment his hand dropped from the stick limply, and the ship nosed up; hovered on the verge of a spin. A terrific bump that sent agonies of pain shooting through his right side cleared his head, and he caught the ship just in time.

The field danced crazily before his eyes. He knew he must go down, or in a little while he would cease to fight off the delicious drowsiness that seemed like paradise as he thought of yielding to it. Just to let himself go——

He kicked the ship around, and took his hand from the stick. He jerked the throttle back, and quickly grabbed the control again. He felt a shock as the undercarriage swept through the top of a tree. As if he were watching some one else do it he unconsciously leveled off, five feet off the ground. The nose dropped, and the wheels hit and bounced. For just a second the pain cleared his head—he knew he was eight feet off the ground, but he did not care.

He fainted as the ship bounced again, the low undercarriage saving the ship from a nose-on crash. Sleepy was crumpled in the front cockpit as the Le Pere rolled almost to the edge of the woods, and a red-headed figure came bounding toward it, rifle in hand.

VI

SPEARS opened his eyes and looked up into a genial round face, belonging to a bald-headed gentleman of middle age. He was in bed, and evidently in a private house. An electric fan buzzed from the wall, and the setting sun sent a few beams of light beneath the lowered curtains. A gray-headed man was smoking a cigaret as he sat on the edge of a table.

"That's the boy," grinned the bald-headed man, ruffling the thin fringe of red hair that he possessed.

"Where might I be?" inquired Spears calmly.

He felt the bandages on his arm, and was conscious of utter weakness that was not unpleasant.

"My name is Saunders, and this is Dr. White. You're in my house, son."

"Oh, yes."

A wide grin came into being slowly as he looked into the bright eyes above him.

"How did they rescue you from the boys?" he asked.

Gib came tiptoeing in, a tall girl with red-gold hair behind him. As he met Sleepy's gaze he leaped for the bed and shook the left hand of the pilot enthusiastically.

"Came to, did you?" he grinned. "Boy, wasn't that a——"

"Meet my daughter, Mary," interrupted Mr. Saunders, and Sleepy smiled up into the face of the girl.

He noticed with approval the creamy skin and gray eyes, fringed with sinfully long, black lashes.

"You're not an applicant as nurse, are you?" grinned Sleepy.

"Not an applicant—I've got the position," she returned with a mischievous light in the gray eyes.

"Good. How did things come out, Gib?"

"You rolled right up to me, almost, and I taxied the ship close to the trees to have a sort of two-way barricade. I popped one of 'em when they broke for the woods, and I previously had winged another one in the arm. They stopped to carry the fellow I nearly killed—he was a fat chap—and before they made the woods the posse got there. When did they shoot you?"

"Second or third time I went across. I'm some cowboy, eh?"

The people in the room looked at each other meaningly as the realization smote them that Sleepy had been flying for a half-hour or more with that wound.

"It was a horribly lucky shot they made," Sleepy remarked.

"Mustn't let you talk too much," interrupted the doctor, who had been listening quietly. "You've lost a bucket of blood, and you've got a nasty shoulder."

"Tell me a couple of more things before I shut up," begged Sleepy. "Where did you come from, Mr. Saunders, and how is the ship? Did I crack up— No, I couldn't have if you taxied it, Gib. Didn't they shoot at you?"

"Yes, but with revolvers. They told us dad was chained in an old cabin out here. He couldn't have gotten away, but they did leave him enough to eat and drink. The ship is all right—Correll is out there now and we'll arrange a guard for it. We've wired Donovan Field that you'll be here three weeks."

"Nothing to do but lay around, eh?" inquired Sleepy.

He yawned as he spoke, and excused himself. Delicious drowsiness was overcoming him.

"That's all—eat and sleep and let that shoulder heal," said the doctor, replacing things in his bag.

Sleepy's eyes roved to the luscious vision of Miss Mary Saunders.

"Nothing to do but lay around and be an invalid. I think I'm going to like it here," he murmured.

They all tiptoed out to avoid disturbing him.

Author of "The Gladiators," "Catching a Tatar," etc.

SOMETHING was standing in the trellised moonlight beneath the pine trees. Something half revealed, half shadow, half seen, half guessed. And it had not been there a few seconds before. Being in England, the land of pheasant worship and the grouse cult, the shadow ought to have been a dog or a fox—but it was not. It looked like neither of these, there was something different about it, a suggestion of greater wildness. It was a little larger than a fox, a little smaller than a wolf; and when it turned its eyes shone green. Then it stepped into the full light, and became a coyote—a prairie wolf.

The reason for so fierce a presence in so tame a land came about as follows. Four months before, this coyote had struck a trap in America—on the south fork of the Stinking Water River, to be exact. One month before he was touring England as part of a traveling menagerie. Upon this night of nights he had been fed by his keeper—who was beautifully and unashamedly drunk.

They found the man asleep in the cage next morning; the key of the cage they found on the floor, but the coyote they never found. So much of this animal's history is known, so much is public property. The rest, that which follows, is here revealed for the first time. It was told to me by the wild folk, and it is not given to all to understand the language of the wild folk.

A thin high scream cut aslant the cathedral silence of the pinewood, a scream almost startlingly like that of a child, and the coyote 'froze'. He sank upon the grass and was still; eyes gleaming, ears pressed close back, thin lean upper lip lifted a little to display the cruel glistening fangs. Only his flanks moved, still heaving to the

exertions of his ten mile removal from the menagerie. Then quite suddenly, came the scream again, and the coyote slid away on his stomach.

He knew that cry, the last protest against fate of a terrified rabbit. He came to a hedge, and peered through. He saw a shadowy beast with a big bush-tail—something like his own—dragging a kicking rabbit toward the hedge. Red fox the coyote noted to himself—and waited. By which it may be seen that he knew all about foxes.

Reynard came on—knowing nothing in his turn of coyotes—and slid into the hedge-ditch with his struggling prey. He preferred to kill it here than in the open, where its pestilential squeal might attract any horror—a keeper for instance.

"*G-r-r-r*", said the coyote, a yard above him in the tangle of hedge-roots and the fox stiffened from head to foot. He was frightened, that fox, frightened no end, for he had never heard a growl like that before in all his marauding life. And a stoat, that was enviously watching the fox, fell backward down the bank of the ditch and fled; while a dry, rustling flutter o'erhead told that the roosting birds had heard that growl also, and were afraid.

A head—almost wolf-like in its evil fierceness, almost fox-like in its leering cunning—was thrust suddenly from out the matted tangle, and the fox visibly quailed. Then, behind the head, came the coyote; not slowly but like a brown streak. The fox was aware of a burning pain in his near shoulder, and he pivoted cringing back among the damp dead leaves of the ditch—forgetting the rabbit. The rabbit had not forgotten him, however. It forgot nothing.

It went, or rather to be more exact, it was gone, for none had seen the going of it. In the wild it is as well to grab your chance while you can; you may not get another. The rabbit must have known. But if that rabbit thought—do rabbits think?—he had check-mated his foes, he counted without the coyote. Check it may have been, but mate was not yet.

In a second the fox—badly bitten as he was—had picked up himself and also the rabbit's trail. Whereupon he went, without comment, into the moonlit haze; and soon, as he galloped, the rabbit danced before him. He could see it a fleeing shadow, a bunched up ball and a stretched out streak alternately.

Bunny had no illusions. The drumming of the four-footed death on the short grass behind left no room for any. He wanted to get back to the warren, which was not far away, very badly indeed. He would have got there, if a strange thing had not happened—a thing neither hunter nor hunted expected.

The fox was first of all aware of it, a long, lean, silent, gray shadow which shot—it almost seemed to fly so quick was it—past close to him. It had eyes aflame, that thing, and he shied at sight of it, as a frightened horse shies. In a flash it was ahead. The rabbit may have heard it coming; but it is doubtful if he knew what killed him. Followed a glint of fangs as the apparition shot up alongside the luckless bunny, a snap, but no pause. At full gallop this ghostly specter had killed and picked up the quarry, swung round in a wide circle, and vanished away, still going like the wind, into the night. Then at last the fox must have realised that this was his new enemy of the ditch, the coyote, that strange, giant, foxy apparition which had come out of nowhere at him, and gone again as a whirlwind might into nowhere, for aught he knew.

Having dined, the coyote set off across country, at the long, tireless, wolf gallop that will run down almost any four-footed thing in the end. He had no idea how far that menagerie might pursue him, and he was taking no chances. A wild creature never willingly takes chances.

Once—that was when he bee-lined over a bare blunt-nosed hill—a line of hurdles leaped up in front of him. He took them in his stride and fell among ewes, many and loud voiced ewes, who rose up as one sheep, and ran about complaining in a full throated chorus. Seeing that the poor outcast's one notion at that time—possibly at all times—was self-effacement, this action on the ewes' part was unkind. For one thing it caused him to fly the opposite line of hurdles like a bird, and for another it awoke a long, low, blue beast, from nowhere special, which fell in dumbly at the coyote's heels. The shepherd called it a bob-tailed sheep-dog, but it looked more like a silent devil in the light of the "cynical moon." It took the coyote half an hour to shake that speechless horror off his track.

Once also—that was when he was gingerly rounding the corner of a cattle-muddied gateway—he fell on to and over a warm,

feathery live thing, which got up and snored away into the night on vast flapping wings, more uncannily than any ghost. The next five hundred yards he must have covered in record time for he was scared almost into rabies. The thing was an owl, a white owl, and a big one at that, though what it was doing in the mud of a gateway no one knows. Perhaps some rat could have told. Rats are generally intimately—too intimately for their liking—connected with the doings of owls.

And once—that was the worst fright of all—he barged head over heels into something that he could not see stretched across a gap, and it clung. He fought madly for a space, rolling about, snapping, and tearing like a thing possessed, for this nightmare held on all round him. Followed a curse from the shadows, and after the curse a man, and after the man a dog—a thin, lean dog this time. The coyote did not like the appearance of that dog, it looked underhand, and even a mole could see that it was built for speed.

This may explain, perhaps, why he bit the man on the hand—his teeth met, I am told—and went away into the night with half the unseen terror which clung, wildly flapping from his hind quarters. The man swore strange oaths and went away in a hurry, which seemed strange. As a matter of fact, however, the coyote had run into a poacher's net stretched across a gap-way for the entertainment of certain hares, and the poacher was about as scared as the prairie-wolf over the meeting.

An hour later came the dawn—cold, unpitying, matter-of-fact dawn—and it discovered this coyote in the middle of a gorse-and-bog-patched moor. He went into retirement for the day in a fox's earth which he sought and found in a great hurry. The stench of the place—for there are few fouler abodes among the wild folk than the den of the little red rascal—made him very literally, and shamelessly, ill. He knew, however, that anything—even the most appalling effluvium—is better than for one of the night prowlers, the outlaws, to be found abroad when the sun is up.

WHEN evening fell, and the shadows hunted the raw, red sun home to his lair, the coyote thrust out an inquiring muzzle, and thrust it back again in a hurry. A man was coming through the gorse—a jet black shadow carved out, as it were, against the crimson sky. Came he to the fox's earth and dropped a rabbit by the entrance. He gave no reason for so strange an action, but the reason—seven of them—had been found killed in his fowl-house three nights before—and the rabbit was poisoned. Evidently this tit-bit, this gift gratis, was intended for the entertainment of the rightful owner of that den, and he happened to be away upon a blood raid, in the opposite direction!

The coyote waited ten minutes after the man had gone, then he wriggled out to the rabbit. He gave one sniff, only one, then he went away, also, straight as a die, and very swiftly, with every hair along his back sitting up all bristly. You see, he was acquainted with poison. He had cause to be, for he had once on a time watched his mother die beside a poisoned carcass, and the terror of the taint which had hung in the air round that carcass lived with him ever after. It had been a nightmare, and the mere whiff of poison a hundred yards to leeward, had the effect of terrifying him for hours.

Like a hunted cat, this wolfish beast, that was not a wolf, panicked across the face of the sullen moor. Then he caught sight of his own shadow cast by the dying sun—a blue figure against blood red grass—dancing along at his side. He never waited to think, but shot away ten yards in three bounds—and stopped.

There was no question about the stopping. One moment he was racing at I dare not say what speed, the next he just—wasn't moving. And the suddenness of it nearly wrenched him to pieces. He had simply bounded full into one of those quagmires, one of those abominations which pock-mark so many moors. But no flies settled on this beast. He did not wait even so long as one second. If he had he would have been a very dead coyote; and he knew it.

How the miracle was accomplished, how, without appearing to pause or think or hesitate, he was able to rebound again exactly as if he had landed upon a spring-board instead of a quaking, shaking, sucking, death-trap, is beyond mere human knowledge. From this bound he reached a tuft of deer-grass, at least one presumes he reached it for he barely touched it, rebounding for the second time and on to firm ground at last. Being somewhat scared, he ran on for a few

yards along the edge of the bog before he discovered that he was exhausted somewhat, and sat down.

It was the hour of brooding calm, when the sun's last rays, lingering, charmed the purple heather into a deeper tone. In the pine-wood behind him—such was the silence—the coyote could hear the hollow purr of the air in the upper branches, like the humming in a shell, and the tiny tumult of an ant city: the indescribable slithering undersound which can only be detected in very still places. Night was stalking westward swiftly over the purple lakes of heather.

A jay screeched 'gratingly, somewhere 'way back in the wood; the last woodpecker had fled laughing into the shadows; the last family of titmice had trailed by, twittering and "twee-jeeing" to each other, through this hall of a thousand columns. Presently came a long-drawn sigh echoing down the pillared aisles, and after the sigh a big brown bird, flapping like some gigantic moth; that was a long-horned owl, and it flew without sound as an owl should.

Suddenly the coyote turned his head. Something—some swift moving shadow—was coming across the bog. How any beast heavier than a mouse could cross that quaking abomination was past understanding, but the shadow proceeded leisurely and unflustered enough, and it did not sink. Instantly the coyote, the outcast, slid to a heather patch on his belly, and lay there crouched; his green glazed eyes fixed and staring at the shadow.

The apparition came on, bounding lightly from tussock to tussock of deer-grass, half insolently, half playfully, it seemed toying with the suffocating death that it only escaped by a hair's breadth at each fairy-like bound.

The coyote's lips dripped, as he watched; his eyes took on a crueler glow. The thing was a deer, he knew the breed: the slender legs, the arched hind-quarters, the graceful step, as if the beast were walking on air. As a matter of fact she—it was a she—was a roe-deer but this he did not know. He took her for a prong-horn antelope, perhaps, or a white-tail deer—but, no matter; his tactics would be the same.

She passed him—he had taken care to lie well to leeward—quite close, so close that as she vanished like some spirit of the wood beneath the trees, he saw the transient gleam of her white rump quite plainly. For a minute he waited—time enough for her to penetrate the wood well out of sight.

Then he dropped his head, and, with tail slightly lifted, settled into the long easy wolf-gallop on her trail. He must have known by the scent how close he was—or how far—for never once did he sight her or blunder on to her heels in the pine gloom, nor was she once startled, or aware of her tracker. Thus nicely did he judge his pace.

As the trail broke from the wood and led, straight now as a die over the open moor, the pace increased. The lone night wind whispered in his ears, and the night-hawks and bats did their own small hunting above him. But he never lifted his head. His eyes were glued on the way ahead. Only his restless ears took note of that which went on around.

Once a fox halted in the middle of trailing a rabbit, to stare at this big wolfish beast loping by with gleaming eyes; and once, something, which was not a fox—though it was as big—stood in his path chattering obscenely, forcing him to go round. That must have been a badger.

Finally—this after an exhibition of clever windings, twists and turns—the trail led to a spruce firwood, black as a well, and still as a well, or death. Here was needed great caution, and the coyote slid belly flat. The whorls of the trees came down and brushed the needle-carpeted ground, difficult to avoid, hard even to creep through, hard that is, when even the faint sound of brushed back branches, would have ruined all in that desert-like silence.

Suddenly, as if some cold hand had seized him, the coyote sank where he stood, sank and was still, like one that is stricken suddenly by death. In front was a clearing, no more than a gap, shadowed as to its center by one lone, big spruce fir. And beneath that lonely shade stood the doe, and she had business with something that was there. She was anxious, that deer, anxious and happy, making odd little noises in her throat—and beside her were two more shadows.

Then she stood out before the moon, and there followed her, two fawns, their great beautiful eyes shining like stars. Dainty spirits of the shades—sleek, shining, satin-eared, velvet-nosed, dappled and light as thistle-down, upon legs "slender as hazel wands."

How long the coyote lay and watched that wonder is not known; some hours perhaps.

He might have been a figure carved out of dark and light oak for all the signs of life he gave. Only his eyes lived, those green orbs, with the strange coldness of cruelty—cruelty is assuredly a cold passion—apparent in their depths.

At last a badger—clumsy, shuffling, furtive, and morose—passed in the gloom. He was in a hurry that beast, and when a badger is taken that way dawn is not far off. This the doe knew—or seemed to know. She vanished with her double charge slowly, under the pall-like shade of the giant and isolated spruce, and when she came out again she was alone.

As a smoke puff fades, so faded this elfin like haunter of the woods. The flash as of a faintly gleaming lamp caused by her light rump as she whisked away, was all the indication a watcher would have had of her departure.

The coyote followed, a slinking evil form in the gloom. Followed her to the edge of the wood, far enough to see the roe-deer safely on her way—but no farther. He had other work on hand.

In five minutes he was back again by the miniature clearing, crouching motionless as before, watching always the gloom beneath the spruce that stood aloof. And the sky paled to gray even as he crouched. So intently were his cruel eyes fixed upon this spot that he never saw a shadow—surely it was no more than a shadow—which drifted up from nowhere special behind him—drifted and stopped.

The minutes dragged on painfully, almost as if the dead silence, the stagnant air, was waiting for something to happen.

A FOX passed, slinking and carmine tinted about the jaws. A pine-marten "rippling in faultless curves," the incarnation of living, moving grace, went by in the dawn, and his jaws also bore the blood stain, the badge of outlawry. A squirrel slid down perkily from some tree near at hand, and slid up again in a hurry, when it saw the couched coyote. The fox was red, the pine-marten was red, the squirrel was red, the watching, waiting shadow behind was red, all of them red, against a background of reddish tree-trunks and pine-needles, lighted up all together and suddenly by the fiery red of dawn, that wonderful dawn which comes after the gray, and is followed again by a day of gray rain.

Suddenly the coyote moved, sat up, and the shadow—the shadow was gone. Only a gleam as of twin stars, a flash as of a low burning lamp, hastily extinguished, marked its disappearance, and made one half suspicious as to whether it had really been a shadow after all, and half doubtful as to its ever having been there at all. This also, the coyote did not see.

Then the wolfish beast moved forward—almost flat he proceeded—and his caution was evident at every careful, creeping stride. There was still darkness under the great spruce, and for a moment he stood confusedly. Then, in a soft place, just the least noticeable spot, exactly where they would be most difficult to get at, he saw the fawns. They were lying down, but not asleep; they were looking not at him but past him, behind him at something that was there—the shadow had come back again.

A gleam of white fangs scintillated in the growing light, but there was no sound as the coyote half rose and dived forward headlong upon the helpless fawns. They tumbled to their feet. They could run fairly well, fast enough to avoid a man, but not a coyote. And they fled.

Then, without any kind of warning at all, the shadow took unto itself life. It hurled itself forward head down, preceded by short, but rapier-sharp horns, at the speed of a powerfully shot arrow; and its mark, its goal, appeared to be the coyote. It was a full-grown roe-buck, and of all the cloven-hoofed ones the roe-buck is the least troubled with fear and flurry.

The coyote was behind one of the fawns—just about to deliver one of his quick, chopping bites on the flank, in fact—when he became aware of a small-sized whirlwind hurtling down upon him from behind.

He realized his danger, and pivoted upon himself, presenting a fanged and snarling front in one and the same second, so it seemed; being specially designed to do so. But in the next second he was removed quite twelve feet by the sharpest pair of horns, and the most impetuous buck, he had ever run up against. When he regained his feet—which was practically the same moment as he touched the ground—he was furious; for this buck was only small—no larger than a pronghorn antelope, and the wound in his shoulder pained abominably. But he had made one blunder; he had not reckoned

upon the peculiar character of the roe-buck —there are deer and deer, and the roe-deer is unique.

Next moment the whirlwind was upon him again; the fury of the charge was extraordinary, and amazed the half-recovered coyote. He did not—being only an outcast wolfling—stand up to it, but skipped to one side, and delivered one of his chopping flank bites. A whirl of pine-needles followed, for the roe-buck can turn as can no other deer, and the coyote fell backward, as the quickest way to avoid a hissing slash of those terrible forked little horns.

Thereafter things happened, and happened quickly. The coyote was no amateur in the matter of keeping a whole skin by agility, and agility alone, but the deer he knew were not like unto this little fury. He leaped, and side-leaped and sprung backward, pivoted on his tracks, spun like a top, rolled from under the flying hoofs, raced like a greyhound, and generally performed on an average thirty acrobatic feats a minute. His foe, however, plunged and stabbed, jabbed and hacked, stamped and tore, and raged, and fumed, and bucked, and backed, and thrust, and cut, and slashed, and foamed, like unto some four-footed fiend. The coyote might have been a magnet, and the buck a piece of steel, so close did they follow one another.

Now a coyote, unharried and unpressed, is many kinds of a coward, but a coyote cornered and hanging on to his life by his whiskers, is just any sort of a devil you like to name. This may be why, at the end of five minutes of this death dance, there were triangular gaps on the roe-buck—chiefly about the flanks—where the flesh had been removed in chunks. On the other hand the coyote was striped much as is a tiger; only the stripes were red, not black.

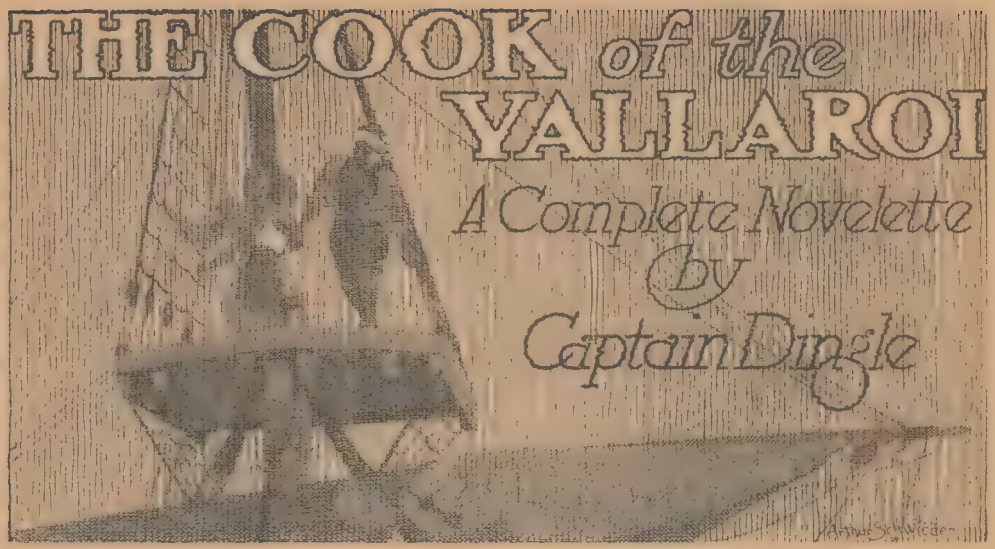
Followed a collision. I don't know how it happened. One of the combatants must have made a mistake somewhere. Anyway, they met. It was a bundle, that is all you could say; a huddle, and it was not nice to behold. The needles flew all whither, and the earth followed suit. Which beast was where, it was impossible to say. Save for the horrible low and continuous snarling of the coyote, there was no sound, but one knew that death hovered round that jumble of legs and bodies.

Then, with startling suddenness it ceased—the fight was over. The roe-buck was standing rocking in his tracks, as a tree rocks in a gale. The coyote lay on his back ten yards away; and both were unpleasant to behold, were unclean to the sight.

Slowly the coyote heaved on to his feet, and stood staring stupidly—himself rocking to and fro—at his enemy. Then, like a broken thing—reminding one in a singular way of some half-killed insect—he dragged himself away into the red eye of the rising sun; a shocking nightmare of a beast, a blot on the beauty of the dawn. And even as he went the roe-buck toppled forward on his nose, and lay still—for ever.

As for the coyote he blundered drunkenly, half blinded, and half choked, straight ahead to the open moor and its scattered bogs, and into a bog, and under it for ever and all time.

And that is why the dozens and dozens of people, who scoured the country for that lost and outcast coyote, never found him—and never will.



Author of "A Shot at a Venture," "Evil Starbuck," etc.

MR. TUDGAY, second mate of the ship *Vallaroi*, stood at the shore gangway gazing irritably along the stretch of wharf at Dunedin. His ship was a big handful for the crew at his disposal, and getting ready for sea was too big a job; five apprentices, two of them first-trippers, constituted the entire available gang. Of the ship's company sailing in the *Vallaroi* from London, only these and the captain were left, and Captain Kirk was even now scouring Dunedin for a crew of any sort to carry his ship to sea, for he feared he might yet lose his boys, who knew little, and cared less, of the legal tangle of words which demanded a cash forfeit from the parent of each apprentice defaulting his indentures. There was a lure for healthy lads in New Zealand, the land of Pink Terraces and tattoed Maoris. As for the rest of the defaulting hands —crew, cook, steward, and the first mate himself—they had only followed countless examples and struck off to seek fortune in their own way.

"Blessed good mind to hop it myself," grumbled Mr. Tudgay.

He caught sight of the youngest apprentice grinning as if he had overheard the shameful confession, and was tempted to turn loose his wrath in physical visitations on the youngster's curly head. The sight of a cart approaching the ship, laden with boxes and bottles of the skipper's private stores, swung his mind from an unhealthy subject to a more wholesome one. He aroused the boys with a resounding deep-sea roar, and sent them scampering down the gangway.

"Bear a hand and put those stores in the captain's stateroom, and watch yourself if either of ye broaches anything," he ordered, and turned away, as a decent mate should, to hide a grin; for the boys, almost before the cart had stopped, had filled each a grimy fist from a basket of peaches with the devilish skill and uncanny instinct possessed by all sailing-ship boys since the first wreck on Ararat.

The chief thing was that the boys were employed, and would be for half an hour, which gave Mr. Tudgay a legitimate excuse for standing idly gazing up the wharf in case the captain arrived. The littered decks were not so littered as they appeared, for most of the rubbish was broken dunnage and useless bits of discarded staging, which were to be put into the cook's bunker or hove overboard as soon as they were beyond the harbor; and the hawsers were ready, the topsails and courses, jibs and spanker were bent—sufficient canvas to carry the vessel to sea—and the staysails and t'gallants'ls, royals and gaff-topsail could be sent up and bent while under way, providing the captain had managed to scare up a crew with two arms and legs apiece.

The second mate's cogitations were broken

off suddenly by the heaving into sight of an imposing procession, led by Captain Kirk in person, looking a bit out of place with his dignified air and gait—the more so by contrast with his following; and the straggling line was flanked by two hand trucks containing a collection of nondescript sea-going gear that would have disgraced a rummage sale. A little way apart, but still with the crowd, a big, darkly handsome man strode along, carrying a bright new portmanteau in his capable hand as if it were a lady's handbag instead of a man-size piece of luggage weighing sixty pounds or so.

"Shake a leg down below, boys," yelled Mr. Tudgay through the saloon skylight. "On deck wi' ye, and bear a hand. Oh, corks! There's a full crew for us, lads, and a bloomin' Don Juan packing his own dunnage that looks the spit of a liner mate!"

"Mr. Tudgay, this is the mate, Mr.—Mr.——?"

"Galway," the new mate supplied, smiling brilliantly and making the second mate squirm with the grip he gave him. "Hope we'll get along all right, Mr. Tudgay."

"Ye'd better," grunted Captain Kirk darkly. "Get a move on wi' yer sea gear, Mr. Galway, and we'll off to sea. The tug's due now, an' we've lost plenty time."

"Crew signed on, sir?" asked Tudgay as the new mate vanished to change into more suitable attire for working the ship out.

"Yes!" snapped the skipper impatiently, then saw the reason for the query.

The men were slouching about the gangway as if none of them had the least notion what part of the ship they belonged to. Of them all, only two showed intelligence. The cook went directly to his galley, and already the rattle of pots could be heard; one seaman had gone direct to the forecastle, and now appeared dressed for work.

"Get for'ard, you!" the skipper roared to the rest, "Are ye thinkin' to make it a pleasure trip? Get changed and tur-rn to. Can't ye put life into them, Mr. Tudgay? Are ye second mate or am I? Here, you parson-looking son of a waterspout! Aft wi' ye and start yer wor-rk! Are ye a steward or are ye not?"

A weedy, round-shouldered, pale-faced biped, who looked as much like a washed-out parson as anything else, shambled aft and followed the skipper into the cabin with eyes upturned in shocked amazement at the manner of his greeting. His lips muttered soundlessly, and his fingers writhed as if he were passing a benediction upon a crew of cannibals the moment before he was introduced to their cook-pot.

The new mate came to time smartly, whatever his appearance might indicate, and Tudgay fell into line easily after Mr. Galway had been on the deck of his new ship two minutes. He was certainly a full-rigged chief mate, if he did look rather more suitable for the high bridge of a shiny liner.

"The Old Man's picked us out a ripe bunch, sir," grinned Tudgay as he fell to work on his half of the gang and started singling up the shorefasts.

"Overripe, Mr. Tudgay; very much overripe. Did you take a slant at the cook?"

"Only man in the crowd who seems to know which end of a ship goes first," grunted the second mate.

"Aye, but take a good quiz at his handsome dial, man!"

The mate plunged into his own duties, and speedily made a working gang out of the indifferent material at hand. The cook was already peeling potatoes, seated on the bitts abreast of his galley door. Tudgay scrutinized him keenly. After the first real look he could scarcely take his eyes away. The man's face looked as if the two ugliest human faces extant had been twisted up together as two wet dishcloths might be, then wrung out, flattened, and prodded into shape roughly with the prongs of a tormentor until something like a face was evolved. The mouth was a slash, the eyes were set in two slits—but the eyes themselves held the fire of the tiger's. One ear was half-gone; upon the forehead was a livid scar; the uncouth head was set, however, upon a neck like a tree, which in turn rose out of shoulders and a chest that would not have shamed an eight-foot Hercules; and the arms, hands, legs and hips were in harmony.

"What's your name, cook?" asked Tudgay, curiously regarding the man.

"Peters, sir; Joseph Peters."

"You're a regular he-man, ain't you? You ought to be in the fo'csle instead o' peeling little spuds. You'd make a top-hole bosun."

"I don't like the forecastle, sir. The men are so rough," replied the amazing cook in a voice which would have reverberated over the harbor if given range, but which sounded muffled and dumb as if through sheer apprehension.

The second mate was to experience a bigger surprize yet. When the ship was bowing to the great ocean swell just before letting go her towline, he was at the monkey-rail overseeing the placing of the booby-hatch, and the new steward emerged from the main-deck saloon door bearing a dish of ingredients for the cabin dessert. Tripping slightly over the high door-sill, the parson-like steward gave vent to what sounded suspiciously like a real, ripping, back-o'-beyond curse and then abruptly resumed his solemn aspect and gait and proceeded to the galley. But the surprize came when the cook, the big, Herculean cook, got up from his own door-sill with amazing alacrity at a sharply flung word from the steward, and took the dish from him with the air of a subdued underling.

At the moment the chief mate, having seen the tug's line let-go, was passing to superintend the making of more sail, when the steward turned aft again and almost collided with him. There was a very subdued exchange of words; even the second mate could detect that, since he was watching keenly. Then the mate loudly warned the steward to look where he was going in future, and they separated, each to his job. Then the cook's grotesque visage was thrust out of the door, and for five seconds he regarded the pair of receding backs with a gaze of such bitter intensity that Mr. Tudgay involuntarily turned away with a shiver.

The incident might have suggested a mystery to any one except a buoyant, youthful second mate scarcely out of his time, to whom the world was a round ball made in such fashion that good square-rigger sailors might be developed on out-and-home voyages to the colonies, which constituted a circumnavigation of the globe every time. As it was, Tudgay was far more concerned in thinking what the luck of watch-picking would bring him out of the frightful mob of incompetents struggling with uncertain hands and feet at the appalling task of putting sail on a full clipper.

ONE of Captain Kirk's good habits was the holding of deck church every Sunday forenoon, and perhaps it was all the better as a habit inasmuch as his ship always carried a number of boys out of decent homes. With Sunday arriving, and his ship stretching away on a composite Great-Circle track for the Horn; with his hulking, scowling, incapable crew at least hammered into some sort of shape, and ship's business going on with more or less smoothness through sheer capacity of himself and mates; Captain Kirk set the boys to work laying out reading-desk and books on the poop, and cast speculative eyes upon the parson-like steward.

"Skeets, ye look as if some time ye had taught Sunday-school," he said. "Can ye conduct a sairvice for me?"

"I could have done a while ago, sir," replied the steward in a voice simply soaked with humility; "but I'm a backslider, sir, a sinner and a renegade, sir; and I can not make a mockery before those young, innocent lads. Please excuse me, sir."

Mr. Tudgay turned away with a face convulsed.

"Innocent boys!" he choked. "I wonder how much o' the cabin delicacies the innocent boys ha' robbed him of already!"

He might also have wondered what such a smug-looking steward, such a model of humility, had said to that tough-looking cook on the first day aboard to send him inside his galley so hurriedly. But since there was no substitute, Captain Kirk would not permit service to be delayed; the skipper took up his place at the desk himself, at the break of the poop where all hands could hear, and bade the mate muster the men aft.

The men came dubiously. Only half an hour before they had all been turned out, on a Sunday morning too, to brace up the yards a trifle, and were sullen about it; for there were enough among them who had made at least one voyage who knew that immemorial custom at sea gave Sunday to the crew. And but for crass stupidity they would have enjoyed the rest, too, except for standing wheel in turn, for the weather was fine even if the wind had not yet settled down true. They came and stood beside the mizzen hatch, sullen and muttering, while the captain opened his book and began to read service.

Midway to the end, the wind came ahead again, and without stopping longer than to give the order, the skipper sent both mates with half the men—those whose regular watch on deck it was—to brace the yards sharp up. Even while Mr. Tudgay howled hauling chanteys in the waist to encourage

the men, the service droned along its inevitable course; and never once did Captain Kirk seem to take his eyes from his prayer-book. But he was the shipmaster even while he played parson, and the end of the service was more than a little broken in continuity.

"As it was in the beginning— That'll do th' foreyard!— Is now and ever shall be— 'Vast hauling that!— World without end— Well th' mainyard, Mr. Tudgay!— Amen. —Turn to, ye useless lumps, and coil up the gear!"

The skipper finished, flung his book down and stamped the poop, cursing to high Heaven the fate which had sent him such a double-left-legged lot of sons of blind tailors for crew, and audibly wondering what sort of mates he had inherited that they could not lick a crew into shape in three days at sea. Perhaps the crux of the matter was overheard by the second mate at the pantry skylight after he had resumed charge of the deck and captain and mate had gone below to prepare for the noon observation. Under the little square of barred glass the steward stood in his tiny pantry handing out to the mate a cup of cold black coffee left over from breakfast.

"Ever see anything like it, Skeets?" demanded Mr. Galway with a queer chuckle.

"Never! The old fool ought to be easy!" returned the sometime meek and lowly steward in tones not at all like those he habitually used.

Mr. Tudgay walked away. He scarcely noticed the change in the steward's tone; but he did notice the lack of respect in the steward's attitude, and wondered no longer why his own watch were already far ahead of the port watch in ability.

BOUNTY ISLANDS, and Antipodes Islands, both the merest groups of specks in a waste of blank chart, lay on either side of the *Yallaroi's* legitimate course; both groups are desolate, both have Government food and clothing caches, there being in those old clipper days ample need for such to succor not infrequent sailing-ship castaway crews. On some groups a boat is left in some secure crevice. On the Auckland group two boats were always available; on the antipodes it was harder to keep such valuable aids, and the single boat alloted to the group had been stolen more than once by passing whalers, though, to do those splendid seamen justice, they nearly always left an addition to stores to pay for the boat. Only the exigencies of whaling, and the stern necessities for sound boats of the capable type used on those island stations, tempted an occasional whaler to accept the gift of the gods and sail away with a new boat.

Mr. Galway seemed well versed in all such matters. He would talk for an hour to the second mate about the time when he was in one of the Government vessels depositing those stores; he even went so far as to talk for an hour with some of the unseamanlike crew about the islands; once, so the ugly-visaged cook asserted, he had shown a chart of the ship's track to two of the seamen, and chatted to them about it in a manner very unlike that of a good chief mate.

The cook told the steward about it, and the steward spoke to the skipper, bringing the inevitable result; the Old Man sent for the cook, and raved at him from the head of the poop ladder. Mr. Tudgay and two of the boys stood a little aft, and could not avoid hearing the rave.

"The Old Man was peeved, wasn't he?" Tudgay asked of the mate with a grin when watches were changed later.

"He ought to be!" retorted Mr. Galway with a fine air of indignation. "You want to watch that plug-ugly cook, Mr. Tudgay; if I'm any judge of men he's cooking trouble as well as poor grub."

"I thought it was about chatting with the men that the Old Man ragged——"

"Well, it wasn't. And I'll thank you to mind your own business. The captain called the cook down because he carried yarns about me, the chief officer, and said I was hobnobbing with fo'csle hands for'ard o' the galley. You know, as well as anybody, that I was trying, as always, to teach 'em a bit o' sailorizing."

Mr. Tudgay ought to have known better, of course; he should certainly have known better than to carry his indiscretions so far as he did after supper, when he was alone for a moment with the skipper on the poop. He was rash enough to disclose to Captain Kirk his suspicions that Mr. Galway—the immaculate mate of such wonderful handsomeness, as the steward had been heard to call him—and some of the least seamanlike of the crew, were too thick for the welfare of any sailing-ship bound home Hornward. The skipper glared at him for a full thirty

seconds, puffing up like a woman on the verge of hysterics; then he opened out.

"Mis-ter Tudgay! I ha' seen traces o' insubordination in ye and the boys since leaving Dunedin, and I'll not have it! I'll ha' ye to know that Mr. Galway is as fine a fir-rst mate as I ever had, and a sight better than ye'll ever make. Ye're talking the same guff as yonder criminal-lookin' cook, and I war-rn ye, an' ye can pass it along to yer ugly friend, that if I want to know o' aught amiss being prepa-ared against the ship, I shall seek for 't in th' galley and among galley friends rather than among the loyal par-rt o' the after-guard. Ha' no more o' it, ma man!"

"All the same, sir, I'd watch that steward if I had command," the second mate persisted rashly.

He really ought to have known better. He was not a first tripper.

"Go to yer room!" roared the skipper, prancing. "Go to yer room for twenty-four hours. And if I see no sign o' yer retur-rnin' sanity then I'll disrate ye! —— me! A boy would ha' more sense!"

"You're right—than a blasted thick fool of an Old Man!" muttered Tudgay, and ducked below for a full round of watches of sleep and meals, scarcely hoping that his punishment would be carried out, but determined to endure it in real comfort.

At a quarter of an hour before middle watch that night one of the apprentices tapped at Tudgay's porthole and found a wide-awake listener to his report.

"The helmsman," he said, "was that quiet-looking chap that talks to the cook. He's the only one as does, sir. He heard all the Old Man said to you, and when I went for'ard to rouse up Lamps for the binnacle lights I saw 'em both very deedy in chat. The cook caught me by the arm and dragged me inside and told me to come along for a dish o' collops—here it is, sir—" passing a covered dish of savory, steamy viands through the porthole—"and told me if I blabbed a blessed word to anybody else he'd scrag me and clap me into the copper. What's up, sir? Isn't trouble, is there?"

"Trouble?" repeated Tudgay, sniffing hard at his favorite dish and setting the food carefully into a snug corner of his locker-top. "Don't talk so —— silly! See what I get for mentioning trouble?"

"Yes, sir, I know. But that quiet A. B. that was in the galley, he pinched my arm till I nearly hollered, and told me in a voice like a blessed snake's that he'd skin me and eat me raw after the cook got finished with me if I said a yap either about your grub or about the Old Man's outbu'st. And he ain't one to chatter without doing, either, Mr. Tudgay."

"I never saw him do anything," grumbled Tudgay, eager for his meat but more eager for news.

"Well, nobody else did till tonight," chuckled the boy, full of his subject.

He was standing within the covering shelter of the half-deck, speaking through a port, hidden and inaudible to all except an intending eavesdropper, and that he had apparently guarded against.

"But," the apprentice continued, "I saw him take on that big whale of a murderer-lookin' cross-jack-eyed sailor in the port watch and hammer seven bells out of him, sir, and——"

"What?" burst forth Tudgay. "Lick that tough? You're as mad as——"

"It's a fact," insisted the boy excitedly. "Same tough as Mr. Galway and the steward have been so thick with. Cookie was referee, because all hands o' the watch wanted to chip in on the side of the plug-ugly. You betcher, sir, the cook said about two words to 'em, and they stood back. Hide the dish when it's empty, sir; here comes somebody."

The boy vanished into the shadows of the main-course like a bit of itself, and left Mr. Tudgay to his reflections, which were none of the clearest. Youthful as he was, yet his sea time had been spent during a period when it was nothing unusual for a sailing-ship to change crews three or four times in a round voyage; and in Australia, New Zealand or the West Coast there were strange characters always ready to take the places of deserting crews, and that with the sole idea of getting as far and as fast away from their shipping port as possible.

Runaway convicts, weary of chain-gangs and breakwater slavery; unfrocked priests, beyond shame at their fall; deserting soldiers, defaulting, smug crooks from places of trust, and sheer crooks—all these went to make up crews of those glorious old clippers that gave all the romance and spirit to the glorious old sea. Mr. Tudgay had seen every type, and though he had never experienced any deeper trouble from such crews than apprehension, he was still young

enough to retain a sacred belief that one day big trouble must burst right under his nose.

Now he was certain that the trouble-laden voyage had come. He disliked many of the crew; he distrusted the parsonlike steward, and through him the too friendly chief mate; he wasn't sure about the alarmingly ugly cook, but had been inclined to like the man, especially so since receiving that steaming dish of Scotch collops, the spoon of which he was even now licking. But since devouring the savory mess he had begun to think deeply, and now he recalled the amazing subsidence of the powerful cook at a single word from the sharply different steward; he recalled with growing astonishment the boy's report of that gorgeous forecastle fight, in which the quiet, slightly built seaman who was a friend of the cook's had whipped the toughest-looking bully in the gang.

The threat of the cook to scrag the boy and make stew of him was lost in the newer puzzle of the skipper. Captain Kirk had never failed to show a subtle power in dealing with refractory crews before; but here was the one time when he apparently fell down hard, for Tudgay could attribute his own temporary disgrace to no other source than the mental aberration of the Old Man.

He lighted a pipe, turned into his bunk and prepared to thresh out the whole matter in the peaceful solitude of his snug prison. He found his tobacco unaccountably difficult to keep alight; he lighted the pipe a half-dozen times, then concluded that there was something amiss more than damp weed, for his pipe was cold the last time he put match to it, though he was convinced that the five minutes' strenuous drawing at it following the previous ignition must have made the bowl hot— Then the poop bell struck four bells.

"Me sleeping like that?" he growled, and slung his legs over the lee-board, rubbing his eyes foolishly and trying to remember anything queer in the taste of those collops.

Nothing that any man could have said to him at that moment could have altered his opinion that he had been drugged. That sheer sleepiness could make him fall asleep was absurd, to him. He was still puzzling when a yell pealed up on deck that brought him to the floor and at the cabin door in a flash.

"Fire!" arose the yell. "Fire!"

Almost immediately the key was turned in his lock, and the door opened wide. He burst through into the warding arms of the skipper, himself rubbing his eyes and making for the companionway in his pajamas.

"On deck wi' ye, Mr. Tudgay, and see what's amiss!" the Old Man cried. "I canna let ye bur-run, though I believe ye've been the cause o' this, wi' yer insubordination. Up wi' ye, man!"

Tudgay went, choking back the hot retort that rose to his lips, and found the ship's company milling in a strange sort of frenzy about the poop ladders, while the mate, with two sleepy boys beside him, bore himself more like a liner captain at a fake fire-drill on a swagger passenger steamer than the mate of a prosaic old butter-and-mutton wagon caught on fire in the wastes of the extreme South Pacific.

Captain Kirk went past the chartroom on his way to take charge, and glanced at the ship's last position as pricked off. The run since previous noon brought her within reach of the Bounty group of islands and rocks. He joined the mate at the poop rail.

"What ha' ye done? What are ye doing?" he demanded. "Have ye ascertained the source of the fire? Where is it, man?"

"Mr. Tudgay is seeking it now, sir," returned the mate with exquisite calm. "He has two A. B.'s and a boy. But I've seen these fires before, sir, and if I might make a suggestion I would say we had better run for the islands in case of disaster."

"I ha' never yet pairmitted slack mates to lose me a ship, Mr. Galway, and if the Lor-rd's willing I shall not pairmit such now," retorted Captain Kirk with a hard glance at the debonair mate.

"Get ye down yon wi' Mr. Tudgay and bring me yer repor-rt, shar-rp!" —

The smoke reek smelled like nothing recognizable, though Captain Kirk sniffed with all the sagacity of a forty-year sea-mellowed nose. For a moment he lost sight and sound of the crew, failed to catch the ominous note in their deep mutterings, and strove with all his faculties to put a name to the amazing aroma carried by the swirling smoke. Tinned mutton and tub butter alone make a cargo hard to set fire to; the butter might make a blazing inferno of the fire when started, but neither it nor the canned meat would be likely to catch fire without strong inducement from outside; besides, that puzzling reek was more reminiscent of very boyish days than of a grave

marine disaster. He was still puzzled when the mate rejoined him shrugging his shapely shoulders.

"Afraid the ship's doomed, sir," Mr. Galway reported. "The butter is melting, and soon it'll catch. The ship will be like a powder-mill then, sir. I would suggest we make for the Bounty Islands while the ship floats; then if we have to take to the boats safety isn't very far away."

In the lantern light at the main-hatch the crew's faces were turned aft expectantly. Expressions ranged from brutal indifference to sullen ferocity; like a hideous mask the ugly face of the cook appeared among them, and as he faced the poop his features were awork with some undecipherable hope, longing or fear.

He caught the captain's eye just at the moment when, together, the mate finished speaking and that strange reek explained itself. As glance met glance, the cook disappeared through the hatch, and the muttered growl of the crew rose fiercely.

"By Christmas, I have it!" roared the skipper, thrusting past the mate and leaping down the ladder. "Mr. Tudgay! Do ye keep the poop and hold the course. I'll see f'r masel'——"

"Better let me go, sir," the mate called out, and started to follow.

The skipper flashed back:

"Stay where ye are! I sent ye to seek, and ye smelled a trouble I believe is not here!"

He reached the hatch, and the muttering ceased through sheer wonder at his expression.

"Touchwood! Punk! Rags!" he mumbled as he flung his leg over the coaming.

In another instant his eyes were watering, and his lungs labored in a thick blanket of pungent smoke through which his smarting eyes made out a red glow against which an uncouth monster shape silently toiled at some devilish task.

He recognized the cook, and in a fury of blind resentment for the trouble on hand hurled himself forward with hands groping for the man's throat. He gasped sharply when his own strong hands were seized in a grip like a vice, yet as gently as might be, and thrust aside. From the cook's crooked lips came the soft warning:

"Easy sir, easy! Don't be hasty. I'm helping you. I knew what was the matter, but the crew would have murdered me if I made any move to let you know. I took a chance when I saw you coming, and I've nearly got it out now. Here, sir; see the trick?"

The man's eyes glittered and his entire face writhed in horrible mirth. Captain Kirk stared at him dubiously and bade him stand aside. Then he flung himself upon the smoldering pan of smoke-making materials and killed the last red spark before ordering the cook to precede him on deck. A grimace of still intenser subtlety convulsed the cook's face, and he seemed to hesitate; then with a shrug he obeyed, and ran up the bulkhead ladder like a great cat, leaping on deck with a crouch and with guarding arms as if expecting a vicious assault.

Nothing happened; and the skipper came up to find the entire crew following the mate around the ship, pulling on a brace or sheet here, turning up a coil there, growling the while like a cageful of surly bears. The cook halted as the skipper reached the deck, waited as if to hear some comment on his own case, then at a brief nod turned and slipped into his galley and shut the door silently.

Captain Kirk stared after the man with open mouth, then shook his puzzled head and joined the second mate on the poop. The helmsman was the same quiet seaman who had whipped the forecastle tough, and the faint light from the binnacle played on his face as he raised his eyes to the star he was holding course by. His lips moved as if he too were muttering, and a spasm of rage swept through the skipper from toes to fingers.

"The fire's out, Mr. Tudgay," he snapped. "It was a dir-rty trick played for some hidden pur-rpose which I shall seek and find yet. Will ye keep close watch on yon ugly devil of a cook? I ha' doubts o' his pair-rt in this queer business."

"The cook's all right! He's about the only one as is!" burst from the helmsman, and the skipper regarded him blankly, amazedly.

The man reddened and fixed his eyes on his star again, shifting uneasily on his bare feet, conscious that he had permitted his tongue to carry him into the unforgivable offense—forcing way into a conversation of his officers without warrant. As if aware of the gravity of his fault, and in desperation determined to be hanged, if at all, for a sheep rather than a lamb, he blurted out again—

"It's the mate you want to watch!"

Captain Kirk peered into the second mate's face, suspicious that a sound he had caught was too much like a chuckle for respect. Tudgay's face was wooden, but he could not hide the gleam in his eyes; and the skipper's mouth was opened to demand attention to duty, which would include punishment of the presumptuous helmsman, when the mate ascended the poop ladder and briskly approached the skipper with a smile that might have meant anything from congratulation to amusement. Captain Kirk stepped forward to tell him what the helmsman had said, but Tudgay reached out, touched his sleeve, and said quietly but penetratingly:

"Don't tell him yet, sir. I can tell you something that'll give reason for the man's charge."

"Mystery on mystery!" growled the skipper angrily; but he merely received the mate's report with a nod, and so far acceded to Tudgay's request as to refrain from telling Mr. Galway what the seaman had exclaimed.

But he was reminded of Tudgay's recent confinement to his cabin, and permitted himself at least one safety valve.

"Ye'll be able to carry on now, Mr. Galway," he snapped. 'Mr. Tudgay, retur-rn to yer room. I'll ha' chat wi' ye in the mor-rning."

Tudgay dipped through the companionway doors like a flash, too well pleased to think of anything but unbroken slumber for the rest of the night. He had no idea what the theatrical fire meant, but placed small importance upon it since it had been discovered and smothered. The thing might even have been a monkey trick of some of the boys, perhaps to gain access to the butter in the hold; for apprentices got no butter in the *Yallaroi*. Anyhow it could be nothing serious.

His decision was shocked back upon his mind in the next instant. Entering the saloon to go to his room, he came upon the steward working feverishly to bundle food and blankets anywhere out of sight. As he stood watching the man in wonder, the skipper entered, and uttered a gasp of astonishment as genuine as Tudgay's.

"What in the wor-rld are ye doing, steward?"

"I heard the cry of fire, sir, and considered it my duty to prepare stores and blankets against a boat venture, sir," replied the man with a greasy smile on his pallid face.

Tudgay passed on to his room, unwilling again to risk the skipper's displeasure; a glance at the dour Scotch face showed him that anger and irritation were very near the surface.

"And why are ye not retur-rnin' the stores and blankets to their proper places now that there's no need for them?"

"I have been laboring under stress, sir. I believed it would not matter if I simply put the things out of the way tonight and asked for some of the boys to help me in the morning."

'Well, maybe, maybe," grunted the skipper. 'Go t' yer bed, then. I doubt ye're a poor body o' a man anyhow. Get awa' wi' ye."

Growling deep in his honest breast, Captain Kirk crossed over to his stateroom and scowled fiercely as he passed the second mate's cabin at finding the door a little open and hearing Tudgay's voice accosting him.

"I told ye to tur-rn in, Mr. Tudgay!" he snapped, and turned the key in the lock again.

The irrepressible Tudgay popped his head through the fanlight over the door.

"I tell you, sir, you must listen!" he said. "I have to tell you something you'll be sorry if you miss. It concerns the safety of the ship and all hands—"

The skipper had passed the door, but the words arrested him. He stood still for a moment, fingering his stubborn chin. Then he stepped back, unlocked the second mate's door and entered, closing the door softly behind him.

"Well? Be shar-rp wi' yer croaking. I ha' small patience left for ye."

Tudgay went to the porthole which looked out upon the recess of the half-deck wing, and peered out. The port opened inwards and was hooked open to an iron depending from a beam; a stout iron cover, for bad weather, was fastened to the bulkhead outside.

"Come on wi' yer yarn!" snapped the skipper impatiently.

Tudgay turned to him with a queer look.

"I thought I caught sight of somebody listening outside, sir," he said.

As he spoke, the skipper's head jerked around toward the door; he leaped to it with something like belief, and as his hand touched the handle the key outside was

turned in the lock. At the same moment the iron cover to the port fell with a heavy clang, and the turning of the big screws could be heard plainly.

"There, sir!" cried Tudgay excitedly. "I told you——"

"Silence, man!" retorted the skipper furiously. "Why did ye not mak' me hear ye, instead o' blatherin' by little bits about mysterious troubles? Here, clap yer shoulder to the door!"

One assault they made, and a voice from the saloon cried:

"Don't try it, cappen! Next time y' bang on the door I'll put a brace o' lead slugs through the panel!"

"What d'ye mean?" roared Kirk.

"Keep civil, and maybe no harm will come to you," returned the voice.

Then came the sound of conflict somewhere forward, the report of shots, the clash of weapons, the curses of savage men.

The skipper and Tudgay stared at each other in speechless awe, but gradually into the junior's eyes there crept the inevitable "I-told-you-so" gleam which even the desperation of the moment could not prevent the skipper detecting. What he might have said about it was halted by a violent impact of bodies against the half-deck bulkhead, the shrill cry of a boy in pain, and the roaring chorus of men in pursuit. Farther away a seaman swore bitterly; a shot rang out; then came the sound of running feet, and the ghastly, suggestive crunch that an ax makes when biting into flesh and bone.

"Oh, man!" groaned Captain Kirk in horror. "Why did ye no' mak' me listen? What's to be done? Poor Galway! Poor——"

"Poor swine!" retorted Tudgay savagely. "I told you to watch him, sir. He's at the root of this, I'll bet my life—if I save it."

He hurriedly related that little conversation at the pantry door, when the steward confided to the mate that the Old Man ought to be easy. Captain Kirk's keen eyes glittered coldly, and his face grew hard and stern as he listened.

Outside the cabin all seemed quiet; but forward, far in the bows, sounds were not wanting to indicate that at least some of the crew were loyal to the ship and were putting up a fight.

"And d'ye say yon parson-faced steward that's so thick wi' the mate frightened the cook into silence wi' a wor-rd?" cried the skipper, bewildered. 'I thought the cook was——"

'I know, sir. And I told you he was all right; so did the sailor, Tom Peters. Now we're in a boiling stew. What'll they do with us?"

'We'll know soon, ma poor chappie," replied the skipper with unwonted quietness. 'The noise is finished, and I doubt there's no more o' oor friends on deck. Poor, poor laddies! Look yon!"

He pointed out through the small round port-glass in the ship's side. The stars were sweeping past in a line of glittering splendor.

"They're swingin' her north!"

A knock came at the door, and a rattle of the handle.

"Take yon fire-ax!" ordered the skipper fiercely.

Then he crouched beside the door, of which the key was outside, and yelled in answer to the knock:

'We ha' an ax! The first man to show his head loses it!"

The silence was suddenly intense. It seemed to Tudgay's strained hearing, as he stood on his toes with every muscle tensed to bring down the murderous blade, as if a sibilant murmur, as of quietest whispering, ran through that awful quiet of the saloon. Then the knock was repeated, and a pitifully small voice, the voice of a boy, called quaveringly:

"It's only me, sir. Let me in."

'Who's wi' ye, boy?" demanded the skipper suspiciously.

The key was outside, and there seemed to be no reason to ask admittance.

'Only me, sir!"

The assurance lost its value by reason of a sob wrung from a tortured body at the end.

"They're all here, captain!" the lad screamed. "Don't——"

A savage curse accompanied a heavy, chopping blow, and the boy's shriek rose and fell into the silence of death.

'By ——, Tudgay, burst the door!" roared the skipper, and hurled himself at the panel.

The stout oak stood with a quiver.

'Gi' me the ax, then! Oh, the devils! The filthy devils!"

'Don't, sir!" pleaded the second mate in a whisper. "If they want to get in, and can not, somebody has taken the key since

we were locked in. They'll murder us both if we burst out, before we can pick ourselves up; and we can't save the lad, sir. We may save the ship, with cunning."

The argument barely reached the furious skipper; but it told, and he fell back, contenting himself with a final warning howled through the fanlight:

"If a man shows his head I'll pit th' ax to it shar-rp! Let the mate come doon and talk ta me, ye murderin' scum!"

A savage voice swore, and a head, arm, and gun were thrust in through the opening above the door.

"Drop that ax!" the man growled, and swung the gun upon Tudgay.

"Brain him wi' it!" yelled the skipper, and with the words leaped like a cat at the protruded gun-hand and forced it downward.

Tudgay struck with the back of the ax-head, and the gun clattered to the floor, inside the cabin; the man fell back among his fellows with a hollow grunt, leaving the white paint of the door streaked with crimson.

"Cap'n, you'd better submit," came the mate's silky voice with a suspicion of a harsher fiber woven in the silk now. "The key is lost; Tudgay must have a spare one inside. Throw it out, and I'll see if I can make terms for you. If you're stubborn we'll starve you first, then burst through and handle you."

Captain Kirk sputtered with anger; the hot retort hovered on his tongue when Tudgay seized his arm, put a finger to his lips, and pointed to the side porthole. A soft tapping sounded on the glass, and the face of Brooks, the oldest apprentice, frightened but still plucky, appeared in the circle. The tapping came from a door-key in the boy's hand.

With a gasp of startled gratification at the knowledge that at least one of his lads was safe, the skipper motioned Tudgay to open the port, while he himself answered the mate through the fanlight. The tone he used efficiently drowned the small noise of opening the port.

'I have no key. Tudgay has no key—" his canny Scotch conscience urged him to mutter "yet" under his breath—"and if we had all the keys in the ship I'd make no' ter-rms wi' a dir-rty mutineer. I ha' a gun and an ax and a detairmination to see ye all hanged for gallus-crows, as ye are. Do yer wair-rst, ye ruddy pirate, and be —— to ye!"

"You'll starve!"

"We can do that—but I doubt we won't."

"The men are desperate; they'll——"

"They may do their ——est!"

"We've two more of the boys. We'll let you listen to them squealing outside here."

Kirk wavered at this. He cast a poignant glance at Tudgay. The port was open, fresh air came in, and the second mate held up a door-key. The boy, who was hanging precariously over the ship's side with one hand to the poop gunwale, shook his head vigorously and whispered sobbingly:

"I'm the only one nigh, and they ain't got me yet, and they won't!"

The boy stopped abruptly, clapped his free hand alongside the other, and wriggled upward out of sight as if he had caught a warning sound on deck. Skipper gazed at second mate, and both saw in the other a resolve to fight.

"I'll hear one squeal fair-rst," he replied to the threat.

A deep rumble of voices seemed to fill the saloon; but Galway made no retort, and silence fell again, leaving the captives in a quandary as to its meaning.

"Maybe this is the only gun, sir," suggested Tudgay.

"Likely. But I widna believe any man fool enough to try to carry a ship o' this size wi' one weapon. What's yon screeching?"

Both listened; then Tudgay darted to the window that opened on to the half-deck recess, which the mutineers had bolted outside. The screws of the iron cover were turning. Tudgay shut the port, gave the inside butterfly nuts an extra twist, flung the thick red curtains over the glass and pinned them, then stood aside, motioning the skipper to the other side, and both waited for the new assault.

"We'll soon know about the guns," muttered Kirk, his eyes aglitter as he watched the saloon fanlight against surprize from that direction.

Soon the outer cover was raised and hooked, and a hearty volley of deep-sea oaths followed the discovery of the blinding curtain over the inner glass. A port glass is a thing of marvelous toughness, and yields to nothing less than terrific force. So far as forcing it, unless with gunfire or blows of a

maul, the outer iron cover might almost as well have been on. A few futile blows with the port-key followed, then Galway's voice sounded in peremptory command, the voices outside receded, and soon the greater angle of the ship's list told of freshening wind and work on deck.

"Pairhaps they'll leave us alone a while now," remarked Kirk.

He was peering in every corner of the little cabin, and his gaze darkened every moment, while the little circle of the side port grew lighter with dawn.

"Ha' ye no outlet—no hatch to yer room?" he growled.

Tudgay raised the square of faded carpet.

"There was the hatch into the old sail-locker, sir. But when you built the sail-room on deck you had the carpenter calk this up." The removal of the carpet revealed a square hatch, flush with the floor, and the line of pitch around it was hard and shiny with age and the chafing of the carpet.

"And what's beneath now?"

"A wing of the store-room, sir. Spuds and flour mainly, I believe."

"Har-rd stuff to shift wi' such small scope," mused the Old Man with a shake of the head. "But man, we must do something! Gi' me the ax, and do ye get busy wi' yer knife. Tak' oof the calking. Mak' no noise, and keep yer eyes peeled at yon fanlight." They fell to work as a yell echoed through the ship from the direction of the foremast.

AS THE horizon silvered with the first light of day, three dark figures huddled in the foretop silently helped a fourth on to the platform beside them.

"I got the key to them, cook!" the newcomer, Brooks, said gleefully, panting and bright-eyed from his perils encountered in passing the key through Tudgay's port-hole, his subsequent Indian-like avoidance of enemies, and his climb aloft.

"Good boy!" muttered the ugly cook, clapping the lad on the shoulder softly.

The other larger figure resolved itself into the quiet sailor who had so manfully proclaimed the cook's honesty to the skipper while at the wheel. Besides these, and the boy just welcomed, another boy crouched there, wide-eyed with fright, but quiet, and willing to share whatever might come.

The lightening decks beneath them were deserted apparently except for a small huddle of men right aft by the wheel; but here and there, about the galley and forecastle, dark splotches lay on the clean planks which looked queerly like sleeping men, yet suggested more than sleep.

The cook laughed bitterly as he scanned the ship; and his laugh was a thing of horrible mirth, for his head was roughly bandaged in bloody canvas, and one powerful arm still dripped blood from a hastily tied handkerchief at the bend of the elbow. The seaman, Tom, was in no better case, for his blue check shirt was a ghastly plaster of red, and his hair needed no pomatum to slick it to his forehead. The smaller of the boys quivered with the pain of a long, shallow flesh cut down his face; and of them all only Brooks appeared unhurt. Still the cook could laugh.

"Well, lads," he said, cautiously stretching a cramped foot over the edge of the top. "something's got to be done right now. Here's daylight, and they'll see us in a little while. Then we shall be targets for their guns whenever we try to move. They'll shoot us if we go down and starve us if we stay up here—unless the captain and Mr. Tudgay bust loose and surprize 'em, which I don't exactly count on."

"The Old Man and Tudgay'd be mutton by now if it wasn't for Johnny Brooks here, as pinched the key out o' the second's door," remarked Tom. "I don't understand what it's all about. They never took me into their conflabs."

"They did me, though, at first," grinned the cook. "Looked more like one of themselves than you, maybe. Didn't you see how they waited on me coming out o' the hold, when I showed up the fake fire?"

"But what is their notion?" piped Brooks.

He shivered in the cold dawn; and his companion, a first-voyage boy, cowered between the men, fearful of what daylight might bring to add to the horrors of the night.

"They'll be copped sooner or later," the boy went on, "and murder's been done. They'll all stretch rope, won't they?"

"Aye, surely. Meanwhile they're in charge of a fine ship, well found, full o' grub apart from the stores, and heading no'th far away from any shipping track, toward the littlest known part of the Pacific."

The cook hesitated with a keen sidelong

glance at the sailor, who met his glance and held it an instant, then nodded.

"Might as well out wi' it, Joe," he said. "'T won't make no difference that I can see. If we get clear, you've done your bit, enough to square yourself anyhow; if we don't——"

The interrupted sentence was more expressive than many words. The cook glanced down upon the still silent deck, and went on:

"Short and sweet, then: Every man-jack o' this fine ship's crew, from mate and steward down to me—that's exceptin' Tom and you lads, and the skipper and second, o' course—is a wanted bushranger and sheep-thief. Yes, me as well, sonny," he grinned in answer to a look of incredulity on the face of the younger boy.

"Only difference is that they all cut and run and got away, while I got jailed but was let out by the front door. Never mind why, now. Galway and the steward was the two bosses of a gang o' cattle-lifters, and I knew 'em all years ago, but quit 'em when I got pinched while out on business for the gang. They'd just reached Dunedin in a stolen boat when the Old Man found me and shipped me for cook. Tom already had a job here, and steered me to him. In five minutes Galway steps up, asks for a chance and gets the skipper jumpin' for joy by offerin' him a full crew, steward and all, complete.

"Soon as they see me, they thought to rope me in along with them, and told me their scheme. They was to take the ship, though they didn't say how at first, sail her nigh to Bounty Islands and shove the skipper and boys and second mate ashore there where they needn't starve because of the Government stores, and where the visiting ship would be sure to call in a few months. Tom, here, they figured on either taking in along with them after he knew the plan, or slipping him over the side if he refused.

"Soon as I see that fire, I knew it was the first trick; and when Galway proposed standing up for the islands I was certain of it. This mutiny is the final bid, and blood's been shed.

"There won't be any landing on well-stocked islands for the Old Man now. They'll kill us all, starve us or shoot us, unless we get top dog pretty quick. They won't stop for nothing, with the wide sea before them and a stout ship to carry 'em to some place where nobody knows 'em and shipping men ain't overparticular about real ownership when a fine vessel's offered for sale at a foolish price."

"You ought to have told the captain at first!" cried Brooks.

"I tried to," replied the cook simply. "Didn't ye see how I never moved a peg on deck wi'out somebody dogging me? Did ye not see how the steward always brought or sent the galley stores along for me, so that I never went aft? Laddie, I was worth more to you and the rest alive than dead."

"That's no lie, neither!" growled Tom, balancing his sheath-knife on his palm and glaring hungrily down upon Galway, who was just emerging from the saloon companionway.

At the same moment Galway, glancing aloft in the way all good sailors have on coming on deck, whether they are good or bad men or only indifferent, caught sight of the huddled figures in the top, now, in growing light, clearly distinguishable from the bulk of the masthead and the main-topgallant-staysail tied up there. A ripping oath escaped him, and he cursed his helmsman and the men on the poop luridly for failing to detect and account for the refugees before. Pointing to them, he ordered them brought down.

"Aye! Come get us!" roared Tom, and his knife flashed in a deadly streak straight at Galway.

Only the swaying out from the mainmast of a main-buntline—the mainsail was furled—deflected the knife and sent it quivering into the planks two feet wide of its aim.

"Now you've spilled the soup!" growled the cook angrily.

Two men started forward and climbed on to the rail at the fore-rigging; but in the nearer crisis the cook appeared to see some cheering factor, for he chuckled.

"Tom, blast me if you ain't swapped that knife to some purpose!" he said. "Now we know they ain't got any more guns, or them men wouldn't dare try to get us that way. Look!"

At the other rail two other men started to climb, and four seamen together approached the futtock rigging with knives in their clenched teeth, while, below, aft, Galway flogged them on with vicious oaths. The cook produced his cleaver, suspiciously dark as to blade, and spat on his hands; but his face grew stony as he noticed that his was

the only weapon. The sight of it, however, protruded over every edge of the top in turn, caused the four climbers to be wary before setting foot on those overhanging futtock-ratlines.

"Go on!" roared Galway savagely. "He can only get one o' you!"

"Come up yerself then, an' let him play wi' you!" yelled back a dubious mutineer.

At the same moment he made a determined upward dash, grabbed at the top, then swung downward again as the cleaver sang and bit deep into the structure of the top. But the men on the other side had seized the opening; one darted upward, reached over, and grabbed one of the boys by the leg, wringing a cry of terror from the lad. Like a big ape the cook twisted around, flung himself full length across the platform, and brought down the cleaver upon the outstretched arm. Hand and forearm parted from the rest at the elbow, and the man fell headlong to the deck below, showering those in the top with spurting drops.

Galway roared, but the man's shriek drowned his roar. On the other side again two men made an infuriated rush, and now the cook saw the hopelessness of it all.

"Up, Tom!" he gritted, darting from side to side with chopping blows. "Up with you by the main-t'-gallant-stay! Up, boys, after him. Can ye climb, sonny?" he asked, pausing a second to place his hand gently upon the bowed head of the younger boy. "Sure ye can, laddie! Up wi' you all now, and if ye make it we have them!"

One by one the boys swarmed aloft on the stay, Tom taking last place instead of first, and immediately under the trembling boy in case he needed a cheering word or a helping hand. The cook kept the top inviolate through sheer animal tirelessness and agility, until the attackers drew back for breath. No man can hang indefinitely to futtock rigging and fight with one hand. Glancing aloft, the cook saw Tom reach the topgallant masthead and make the boys secure; then, peering over the edge of the top to be sure of his distance, he slung his cleaver to his neck with a rope-yarn stop cut from a coil of small rigging and swarmed up the stay after his fellows.

"Now if they follow up the stay I can chop down a bloomin' army!" panted the cook, unslinging his fearsome weapon.

But Galway was watching, and as soon as the first man crossed the foretop and gripped the stay to swarm to the mainmast, his voice rose in a savage bellow:

"Come down, you blasted lunatic! All of you come down, and get after 'em by the main rigging."

One man remained on deck by the fore shrouds, to guard against swift descent; another stood by the main, and Galway himself watched the mizzen; then every available mutineer swarmed aloft on the main, determined to overwhelm that little bunch of clinging figures high up on the slender topgallantmast. And a new influence entered into the game; the parson-like steward, Skeets, emerged from the cabin door, glanced over the ship, and spoke in a sharp tone to Galway, who glared fiercely, but made no retort.

"Come down, all but two of you!" yelled the steward, who had apparently assumed command.

The men climbing, almost under the main-top, paused. In the breathing-space the cook, seeing the precariousness of his position on so frail a hold, slithered down a backstay and gained the main-top, where he might still do stout service against his attackers. The boys were safer farther aloft.

"Come down and work the ship!" cried the steward. "Leave 'em up there; they'll come down when they get hungry or thirsty!"

The men hesitated, some descending, others seeming to hang upon Galway's orders. The steward flung his arms about in rage, and cursed the mate.

"Leave 'em up there, and who's to stop them spotting a ship and signaling her before we can?" yelled Galway.

"Shoot 'em down then."

"Aye, I might, if you hadn't sent the Old Man a present of the gun!" bawled Galway, thrusting his convulsed face close to the pallid visage of the steward.

Up aloft the cook and his companions began to take keen interest in the row; the hesitating seamen in the rigging began slowly to follow their descending mates.

Tom, at the maintopmasthead with the boys, called down softly, and the cook heard—

"Joe, there's smoke to the s'uth'ard!"

"Up to the truck wi' ye, then, and bend yer shirt to the royal-pole for a signal o' distress," returned the cook.

Then, sure that it would be done, he turned his attention to the little scene on the poop.

It swiftly reached a climax when the steward, having lost completely all vestige of his godly aspect, brought up his fist in a lightning-like uppercut to Galway's chin that knocked him clear off the poop into the arms of the first hurrying men. In two jumps the steward was upon his foe again; but now the men took a hand, some hauling Galway clear, others rallying around the cock-a-whoop steward. And with Galway on his feet again, pale with rage, coldly murderous of eye, the fight closed in grim silence; not three blows had been exchanged before all hands closed in a milling, savage mêlée.

It was one of the boys who first caught sight of a cautiously protruding head at the lazaret-hatch abreast of the wheel, the wheel that swung as the ship plunged along, unattended since Galway, who had taken it to send every available man after the fugitives, had left it in turn to beard the steward.

"Tom! Joe! There's the Old Man!" the lad cried, scarcely lowering his voice from its piercing treble.

Had he shouted the news none of the furious mob on deck would have heard it; for blood was flowing now, knives and belaying-pins hammered and cut, while Galway and Skeets were locked in a death grapple, thumbs at eyes or fingers sinking into throats.

Aloft at the main truck flew a blue check shirt, bravely proclaiming to all who saw it, in the ancient language of the wind-driven navy, that a seaman wished to quit his ship. Tom slid down, and as he passed the lads he bade them follow him, for the cook was calling them softly, and all the while he was striving to attract the attention of that peering head aft.

Huddled in the main-top, they saw Captain Kirk hoist himself swiftly through the hatch, and turn to give a hand to Tudgay. When both stood free, plastered from head to foot with flour like millers, armed with ax and revolver, one of the boys excitedly cast to the winds all caution and threw his leather-vizored cap at them. It pitched fair at the skipper's feet, and in a moment communication was established by arm semaphore.

Sure of the situation now, the skipper and second mate advanced to the poop rail, each snatching up an iron pin from the mizzen rigging as he passed, in case of need, and stood gazing down upon their foes battling for them. The brutal fight had reached a point where no outside interference could break the intense application of the combatants to the business in hand. The mate and steward swayed and stumbled blindly among the others, knees tottering, breath wheezing through red froth at the lips. Galway's handsomeness had departed like a Summer cloud under the red disfigurement of an empty eye-socket; the steward's lips were drawn tightly back from grinning teeth, but his pale face had grown purple.

"Come on, Tom!" gritted the cook. "Lads, stay here. You can do no good. The thing's a'most over anyhow. Now, Tom!"

This time he gripped the cleaver in his teeth as he swarmed dowñ by a backstay, closely followed by the seaman. As they reached the deck, the cook darted into his galley, and emerged wielding the "tormentors"—a fearful weapon, that huge salt-meat fork, in capable hands.

"Take the cleaver, Tom," he said, gripping the great two-pronged fork, "and let's clean this thing up."

They rushed aft, and reached the edge of the fight without notice. The deck was littered with groaning ruffians, and stained in great dark patches. The skipper and Tudgay leaped down the ladder to join their allies as the two chief combatants pitched headlong and brought down others in their fall.

"Tap 'em, lads! Gi' 'em a bit wallop ta quiet 'em," sang out the Old Man, and suited the action to the words by knocking all the fight out of a cursing scrapper with a blow of his iron club.

So far had the fight gone that there was no call for cleaver or fork, ax or pistol. In less than half a minute the two belaying-pins had scattered all the remaining wits of the mutineers, and then the lads were called down to fetch rope to bind up the fallen.

"Put the ship on her proper course, Mr. Tudgay, till we ascertain damages," said the skipper, coolly turning over the mate with his foot.

Galway breathed stertorously, his limbs twitching. The steward breathed too, but faintly.

"Tom sighted a steamer making t'wards us, sir," said the cook. "We flew a signal to her."

He pointed aloft where the shirt fluttered brightly against a clear sky.

"I doubt if any steamer'll want to relieve us o' such cattle," muttered the Old Man, shaking his head sorrowfully as he remarked the state of his ship and thought of rounding the Horn with such a crew, even if he got them in hand again.

"If so be as it's a Government steamer, sir, as is by any chance looking for us, she'll be only too glad to take care of 'em," said the cook simply.

"Why? What do ye know, mon?"

Tom chipped in and told the skipper briefly the history of the crew, and gradually Captain Kirk's eyes were opened wide.

He said nothing until he had taken the binoculars aloft and regarded the distant steamer intently for several minutes. Then he too used the backstay for speedier descent, and sent Brooks to take the wheel while Tudgay looked up the code-book and deciphered the several signals repeated to him.

"What d' they say?"

"New Zealand naval steamer, sir, telling us to heave-to until she looks over our crew."

"Then ye were r-right, cook!" cried Kirk with emotion. "I ha' been blind. We'll ha' ta go back now for a crew, I doubt, unless yon steamer can spare us men. Bring her by the wind, lads. We ha' no men to heave her to. I'll hoist a signal masel' to tell him so.

"But, cook, I dinna want ye ta be taken wi these gallus crows. Ye say ye were wi' 'em once. See, mon, if ye hide awa' below, I'll tell 'em ye were killed and chucked owerboard. Awa wi' ye. Yonder comes the steamer."

"Joe don't have to hide, sir!" Tom blurted out.

"Let the mon speak f'r hissel'."

"He won't. I'm his brother, and I speak for him. Joe's done his bit in chokee, but he ain't wanted. He got his pardon same time as he got his face all chopped up like it is, wi' the shovels of mutineerin' convicts as was trying to murder the warders. Get yer parchment, Joe, in case 'tis wanted."

The cook, now that the emergency had passed, resumed his air of unobtrusiveness that had marked him since joining the ship. He went to his sea-chest and returned aft, clutching a folded paper with much the same expression as a boy wears when presented with a certificate for good conduct in front of his mates. The look sat queerly upon his marred face, but he broke into a quiet grin as the steamer swept around and lowered boats, and the dour Scotch skipper remarked:

"I'll ha' ma eyes owerhauled before I sail a ship ta sea again. I thought yon steward, Skeets, looked like a pure-white woolly lamb, and ye looked to be a shaggy wolf, cook. I asked the mon ta read a sairr-vice the fairst Sabbath oot, d'ye mind?

"A-ah, weel! 'Tis the frailty o' us poor humans, I doubt. Ye're all wool, cook; all white, fleecy wool, f'r all y'r har-rd mug, and—" the steamer's boats were alongside, the officer hailing—"and if oor friends ower the side tak' us in tow, or lend us hands ta wor-rk ship, but leave us the dead ta bury, I'll ask ye ta r'read the sairrvice afore we dump 'em to their brither shar-rks!"

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

A WORD from J. D. Newsom in connection with his story in this issue:

New York City.

The custom of allowing captives to live a fairly free and independent life until their heads are needed may sound queer, but it is an actual fact. Such men are allowed to marry into the tribe and usually go to their deaths quite cheerfully when the time comes. Their children, however, belong to the mother's clan, group or moiety and are allowed to grow up under the tutelage of their maternal uncle. It is a rather "quaint" custom.—J. D. Newsom.

TO MY relief and surprize, my explanation to Camp-Fire of our magazine's use of dashes instead of cusswords was strongly backed up by nearly all the letters that came in, and there have been a lot of these letters. I'm glad. I can't see my way to any other course in the case of this particular magazine and, on the other hand, I don't like to follow any course to which the majority of you are opposed.

But I forgot to cover one point. Two of you raise this point vehemently in letters to me and they are, I think, quite right. Dashes for cusswords, yes, but when it comes to dashes for "God," "hell," "devil," etc., used, not as cusswords, but in a perfectly legitimate way, there's no need of dashes. Yet our magazine has, on various occasions, used them in such cases. That use of the dash is as offensive to me as it is to any of the rest of you. I'm "agin'" it and always have been. But there are seven of us on the staff and, while most of us have been here for years, there are changes now and then. As there are a few thousand other things to watch out for, this distinction in the use of dashes isn't always followed or even clearly seen.

For that matter, it's often hard to draw the line. Those of you who have read proof know that "style and consistency" are often hard to maintain. On one side the line you'll get a series of cases, each case leading logically on to the next, demanding for it the same treatment, and all of a sudden you'll find you've crossed the line—and done it logically too. Or, stated the other way, you'll put one case on one side the line, later put a second case on the other side, and then find there's no logical distinction between the two.

We have lots of arguments on the staff over cussword cases. When is a cussword a cussword? Sounds easy to answer, but sometimes we don't find it so. Also, as stated already, sometimes we just make mistakes.

Our intention is to use the word itself whenever it is not plainly a cussword as used in that particular instance. Sometimes we'll make mistakes, or at least our judgment will differ from yours. Just be easy on us and credit us with good intentions.

Another thing. In poetry we'll "let 'em ride" even as cusswords unless they get too dog-goned bad. That isn't quite logical perhaps, but when the word is essential to the rhyme it is pretty violent stuff to stick in a dash.

AN INTERESTING report from one of our comrades of the gentler sex regarding Daniel Boone's brother and his family in general:

The name and fame of Daniel Boone are inseparably connected with the history of Kentucky. The old pioneer has been honored in many ways, and at the present time a fine statue of him, clad in hunting garb, coon-skin cap, rifle in hand, stands in Cherokee, one of the most beautiful parks about Louisville.

MANY of the descendants of Daniel and his brothers still live in the State, the old Boone homestead being located at Boone's Landing about thirty miles below the city on the Ohio River, and not far distant is the site of an old mill built by the Boones at a place called Booneport. The descendants of Hiram Boone, a brother of Daniel, live at Boone's Landing and a member of the family, the late Grandison Boone, used to relate that when a small boy he saw Daniel Boone, who stopped there on his way to Missouri to bid his kinsmen good-by. Grandison Boone had but a childish recollection of the old trapper, but his description of him tallies exactly with that of others who saw him at that time. Boone had blue or gray eyes and brown hair, and at the present time many of his lineal descendants have the same, while the collaterals are brunettes, their dark hair and eyes probably inherited from Boone's wife, who was a Bryan.

I HAVE been present at many of the family gatherings of the Boones, which country-bred folks would call "dinings." Early in the day the members of the various families would begin to arrive. Men, women and children, horses, mules and hound dogs; the squawking of chickens would be heard; huge baskets of vegetables would be borne in from the garden, long rows of cakes were outspread in the Summer kitchen while in the inner kitchen, where the chefs of the household were on duty, the most luscious odors would fill the air. City folks would stand aghast at the generous supplies of food prepared and its infinite variety.

Meanwhile the men sat under the trees discussing crops and politics over tall glasses of cold mint juleps. Some chewed tobacco, some smoked reeky pipes, while the horses and mules, taken out of the traces, browsed contentedly close by. The hounds tumbled in the grass with the youngsters, or loafed about the kitchen door, slobbering in delicious anticipation of the feast.

When dinner was served all the guests sat about a long table loaded to the guards with eatables. Fried chicken, rosy old country-cured ham, chicken and dumplings, corn pudding, field beans and bacon, bacon and greens, tomatoes, raw and cooked, butter beans, spoon corn bread, rhubarb, heaps of snowy mashed potatoes, buttermilk and hot coffee, pie, cake, preserves of all kinds, pickles, all the riches of field, garden and orchard were outspread, while the women of the immediate household waited on the table and urged their guests to help themselves bountifully—"Uncle Hiram you must take some more cake," "Cousin Squire, I want you to sample my cornbread," and "Aunt Becky, I made this lemon pie after your own recipe."

THE conversation was Boone from post to finish: all the happenings in the family, births, marriages and deaths. Old stories were revived, particularly one to the effect that when the State of Kentucky brought the remains of Daniel Boone and his wife back from Missouri the real bodies were never given up, but weights placed in the caskets so that the coffins, buried with so much pomp at Frankfort, hold no honored dust, but as most of the Kentuckians know no better they are perfectly satisfied. Another story revived and retold was that of Daniel's brother, Squire Boone, who, it is stated by historians, was killed by the Indians.

The family indignantly disclaim this statement and declare that he settled in Indiana, on the Ohio, near Boone Township, and there raised his family. There was a small cave near his home and on the walls of this cave Squire carved religious and worldly-wise sentences. One of the former ran, "I sit and sing my soul's salvation." One of the latter was to the effect, "Beware of intentions for fear of preventions," possibly intimating that it was foolish to tell what you intended doing last some one frustrate your plans.

When old Squire felt his end was near, he got his coffin, and selected the cave for a place of burial. He made his three sons promise solemnly to place his remains there, sit up with them for three days and nights, then close up the entrance forever.

This they did and for many years the old man remained unmolested in his rocky sepulchre.

SOME time in the 60's —— —— purchased a farm on the Kentucky side of the river, below Louisville, and it was there that he died on a black storm-swept night. His son, —— ——, a thoughtless, rollicking young man spent some time on this farm, having for his companion a member of one of the oldest and most aristocratic families in the State. One day these two, accompanied by a negro servant and their hunting dogs, crossed the river in a skiff and went hunting in the Indiana woods. During the trip they imbibed freely from their hunting-flasks and, after wandering over a big stretch of country, finally stumbled on the Boone cave.

I have never heard whether they knew the story of this cave or not. Anyhow in a spirit of recklessness they broke open the rude entrance, dragged the skeleton of old Squire from its resting place and scattered the bones about everywhere. It is whispered to-day that a distinguished member of the Boone family, now living, has one of the leg-bones of old Squire, though he can never be persuaded to admit the fact, even to his own household.

—— and his gay companion finally withdrew to their boat and the negro rowed them back to the Kentucky shore, fully convinced in his superstitious mind that the party was damned forever. It is certainly true that —— had persistent bad luck after this escapade, and died a violent death, while the Boones regarded his taking off in the light of a retributive justice.

The waters of the Ohio still glide peacefully past the cave, the forests have disappeared and prosperous settlements sprung up close by, but the memory of old Squire Boone lives immortal in the traditions of his descendants and those of his brothers. One and all they snap their fingers at the historians and their story that the Squire was killed by Indians, and declare that he died peacefully in his bed, wearing his scalp to the last.—ELVIRA MILLIE SLAUGHTER.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Leonard H. Nason rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Chicago.

So now I am come to take a place at the Camp-Fire, to meet with other readers, adventurers and authors. The first I have ever been, the second some little time, and the third have but now become, hence this standing up and this bow and this present writing. For all that I am of tender years, I have been with the most of those about this Fire, what time they were in the far places of the world, upon their different occasions. He that went down to the sea and reefed topsails in the gale and passed the weather earing, I have been with him, albeit I stayed in on the yard, in the bunt, and clung to the jack-stay with both hands, for which I was beaten about the ears by the second mate. He that hath been to the Spanish Main, and on the beach thereof, I have been with him, and have been cast out of the American consulate, whither I had gone for food, on my ear, and gone to the British, and been betrayed by my accent, and then sought a missionary, and been given the grubstake that my own Government had denied me. What so cheap in the Central Americas as the life of a Yankee?

Those among you that know the feel of a squeegee, and a marine's boot, and the joy of smuggled cigarets in the brig, and no tables down for days, and a tompion lost in a seaway, with the North Atlantic coming in through the breech-block like a shower-bath, I have been with you, and have polished brightwork and seen the world through a port-hole and strained shellac through bread for the alcohol therein like the saltiest shell-back among you.

And last, I was with those who went to war. Hospital, *huit chevaux*, replacement camp, M.P.'s, shipwreck, *vin ordinaire*, submarines, I knew them all. From Mezy to Montfaucon I went, I and my comrades of the Rock of the Marne, with our battle cry of "When do we eat?" on our lips. Two bites of the dust I took, one at Mont St. Père, and one in the Argonne, which last was near to being the death of me. And then at last I was cast away on Fire Island with the *Northern Pacific* and beat a watery grave by a pig's whisper.

So much for the past. I have hung up my sword, and made my old tin derby into a flower-pot, and given myself in marriage, and will henceforth live in peace, and so to my grave, to which I expect to go in a hearse, and without boots. It is in my mind that this can not be fulfilled, for it hath been said of me that I was born to be hanged.

Now then, greeting to my new comrades of the Camp-Fire. And to the many gallant gentlemen and true adventurers that I have met upon the Road, to whom these words may come, greeting. May they read my efforts with a kindly and not too critical an eye. How!—LEONARD H. NASON.

COMRADE MARINO forgot to give his own address, so I couldn't get in touch with his friend. If the latter sees this, will he please tell me in just what way this magazine is printing British propaganda? Or will any one else who has discovered British propaganda in our magazine write me the details? Generalities on the subject mean nothing except probably some one with eyes larger than his brains or else some one who's busily engaged himself in propaganda on the other side. Give me concrete, detailed facts or don't bother to talk at all. Also, kindly give me your word that you yourself are not a propagandist for either side.

Those who accuse us of anti-British propaganda are given the same invitation. I'm very eager to find out whether this magazine is pro or anti in this question. So far I don't know.

While we're at it, let's everybody send in detailed charges as to the magazine's being pro or anti on all the other foreign nations. Might put it to a general vote and then we'll know just which nations we're rooting for or against. The next step after that is to get the Secret Service to work finding out

just how many millions of dollars are being paid to subsidize us and then make us stop taking money from both sides.

Seriously, I'll venture that an appreciable percentage of these propaganda-hounds on various subjects are getting real money for writing these letters of protest. Still seriously, I'll plead guilty without hesitation to friendliness toward our Canadian neighbors to the north. If our country and the British Empire ever do go to war, I—and this magazine if I'm in charge—will do our little best against them. I hope there never is such a war—nor a war between us and any other nation, and meanwhile I can see no earthly reason for not being friendly to the Canadians with whom we've lived in peace for over a hundred years.

Yes, in the magazine I've stood against attempts to breed ill feeling between Canadians and us. Why not? You who try to breed trouble are the ones to justify yourselves. We're at peace with Canada; why should any one do other than wish to preserve that peace?

As to the British Empire in general, it's done a lot of splendid things and a lot of rotten things, has splendid points and rotten points. So have most other countries, including ourselves. I have no brief for or against it. Let's judge other nations chiefly by what they do and are from now on.

As to these people with their heads full of charges of propaganda against our magazine, they make me sick. If they're such —— good Americans they'd better put in their time doing things for America instead of talking against other countries. If they're not good Americans, they are propagandists for some other country and have no business talking to Americans at all.

If any misguided fanatics do send in charges, as facetiously urged above, no such generalities as "such and-such a story is anti-this or pro-that" will get any consideration. Get down to cold, hard, detailed facts or don't talk. If this magazine is being made the unconscious tool of any propaganda I'll be might glad to learn about it. If it's the conscious tool, I don't know about it. If I'm a liar, produce the facts.

INCIDENTALLY, since this friend of comrade Marino's charges us with British propaganda, he won't object, not to charges, but to questions, about himself. He and his father are 100% Americans. Was his mother 100% American? Was his father, mother, or any of his four grandparents born Irish? Or German? Or Austrian? Or what? Is he himself an Irish sympathizer? German sympathizer? Or sympathizer with any other foreign nation? Is he employed in or engaged in any kind of anti-British propaganda? If so, is he paid for it? By whom? How much? Interested in any other kind of propaganda? Religion? What service rendered to America? By his father? By any other relation? If war service, state whether through draft.

Understand, I'm making no charges. Merely asking for facts. In other words, what right has any one to slander and libel this magazine with an untrue charge that is damaging to it and for which he can be haled into a court of law? Oh no, I'm not going to hale him into any court, but I'm tired of loose talk. Also, is there any reason why he should call me up on the carpet and not come up on it himself?

Propaganda—this country is rotten with it. All kinds. I'm very little worried over these unfounded charges against the magazine, but—how much propaganda is being spread by those who bring the charges?

Here's the letter. Be sure I have no irritation against comrade Marino. He talked facts, talked straight—heard a charge of propaganda and went frankly after the truth. That's good Americanism. I hope he has also asked his friend for detailed, concrete support of his charges.

New York City.

I tried to make a friend of mine interested in your magazine some time ago, and he told me that, while your stories may be very good, he never became a subscriber, because your stories for the greater part were nothing but thinly veiled British propaganda. He is 100% American as was his father before him, and he insists that should war break out with Great Britain your magazine would be one of the first to be suppressed.

I told him I would write you about it and he said yes and suggested that I give you his address. I am not enclosing it, but if you request it you can have it.—JAMES MARINO.

SOMETHING from Captain Dingle concerning the "makings" of his story in this issue:

Pitts Bay, Bermuda.

The story is fiction in the lump. Yet there *was* a cook, an ex-convict, pardoned for bravery, who afterward beat off a band of crooks seeking to rob the hotel he was working in. Since I heard the story from his own lips, aboard the ship *Vallaroi* in Melbourne some time around 1894-6, in which ship he

was sailing for home, I made a sort of literary cocktail out of the pungent ingredients, it is to be hoped with some measure of appeal to the taste of *Adventure's* readers.—A. E. D.

F. S. DURYEA, of Brooklyn, sent Edgar Young several copies of the *Marconigram* published at Porto Velho, Rio Madeira, Brazil. The copy is dated September 2, 1911, and Mr. Young tells me the *Marconigram* was published by the contractors who built the Maderia-Mamore railroad. Like Mr. Young and Mr. Duryea, I think it deserves wider publicity.

Who wrote it? Was the *Marconigram* the first to put it into type?

The Lay of the Tropical Tramp

We've tramped 'round the earth from twenty north,
To twenty or more degrees south—
We've lived in the gilded lobster halls,
And we've lived from hand to mouth—
We've struck old London when flush with coin,
And roamed through New York's streets—
But we've always hit the tropical trail,
When we find our bank rolls cease;
We've drunk all drinks, from Pommery Sec
To pulque and White Label—
We have smoked dried grass and poros vile,
Or perfectos fine, when able—
We've borne mosquitoes, chigoes and fleas,
Screw worms have claimed attention—
Malaria, ague and "Yellow Jack,"
And diseases that need no mention;
But even though we parch and bake,
There's joys to balance the scale—
A pair of dark eyes at every place,
And good men along the trail;
Men with stories wild and strange,
Yarns that beat creation—
Sweet-scented liars from every clime,
Drifts from every nation;
Tropical tramps, tropical bums,
Tropical sour-doughs all—
We hit the pike on the tropical hike,
And expect to, 'til we fall;
Through chapparal, mesquite, bamboo and palm,
'Til the sunset of life doth fade—
We'll tramp till we're lost, 'neath the Southern Cross,
And get put to bed with a spade.

WHEN Talbot Mundy gets into touch with his library again maybe we can get some more dope from him on the Ark of the Covenant and kindred matters. Meantime he gives us some more data and tells where we can get books of reference. Lots of you have written him and I know that he has, so far as able, answered every one of you—no small piece of work and I don't know how he gets time for it.

I must begin by apologizing for the delay in answering the scores of fellows who have taken such a surprising interest in the whereabouts of the Ark of the Covenant and the whole mystery connected with it.

Even now I'm writing at a disadvantage, being three thousand miles or so distant from my library, which is in storage, so I can't even send a friend very well to write down the titles and authors' names of the score or so of books that I have on the subject.

THE names of three books that I can remember are "The Coronation Stone," "Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright," "The Ten Lost Tribes." The name of the author of the second one is Bishop Allen, and of the third is Willis. But there are a great many more, and they are all kept in stock by my young friend A. A. Beauchamp, publisher, 603 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., who has been young for half a century or so because he dares do what delights him. He even runs a magazine on the subject. I guarantee him to be dead white, and I don't doubt he will send a list of everything on the subject that he has for sale if requested to do so. What he knows about it compared to what I know is as infinity to a small dog barking. However, I'll set down as much as I remember without notes, and trust any of you who know any more about the subject to correct misstatements.

THE English Coronation Stone in Westminster Abbey is the stone on which Jacob laid his head at Bethel, when he had that famous dream, which some thinkers say explains the whole metaphysical foundation of the universe, and others say was probably produced by dope. (Myself, like Disraeli, am on the side of the angels.)

In that stone there are still the iron rings, which Moses caused to be fixed in it so that the men who carried the Ark and the other temple paraphernalia could pass rods through the rings and handle it easily. It also has a crack in it, which is asserted, not plausibly I think, to confirm the story of one of Moses' miracles.

I believe that the Ark of the Covenant is certainly in Ireland, and that it will one day be found there, at or near Mount Tara. I know the name of the man who brought it, along with Jeremiah and the Ark of the Covenant and the Princess who was Zedekiah's oldest daughter, to Ireland by way of Egypt from Jerusalem, after Jerusalem had been destroyed.

THESE are dangerous days in which to say how much you believe, and why. It's so easy to be accused of opinions exactly opposite to your real ones, and anyhow this seems hardly the right place for a metaphysical discussion. Science and superstition seem to be almost as confused as they ever were. What you know, however, is what you can prove; neither more nor less. No man's opinion or say-so is really proof of anything. So in answering the question as to whether the Ark of the Covenant if rediscovered would kill whoever touched it I must be understood to be stating my own opinion and nothing more.

I believe that it did kill any unauthorized person who touched it "in those days." I believe it would not kill anybody now, although it could be made to kill instantly if there were any one around who knew as much as Moses did, for instance, or as much as the Israelitish priests knew, who inherited the knowledge of Moses and gradually let it dwindle

into superstition until it finally became mere legend. I suspect that men like Edison and Tesla (hundreds of others, too, of course) have approached attainment of a similar knowledge, although they have gone about it in a different way.

But I am a heretic. No orthodox person agrees with me. Turning on the light by pressing a button looks like a miracle to me. So does an oak growing out of an acorn. I have never ceased thinking since a Sikh once asked me "If the Creator is omnipresent, where are *you*? And if He knows everything, how much do *you* know?" To my mind everything is miraculous or nothing is. I really don't care which end of the stick you hold to hit back. I know high tension wires will kill if touched, for I've seen it proved, so I'm able to believe that the Ark of the Covenant would kill, if touched without gloves and if any one had "turned the juice on."

THERE is a book in two volumes called "The Great Initiates," written by a very intelligent Frenchman and ably translated into English, which is sold by Brentano of Fifth Avenue, New York, and throws more light on ancient miracles and the men who "made" them than anything else I have found. It is rather an expensive book—six or more dollars, I think—but an awfully good money's worth. I brought my copies West with me and lent them to a Pullman porter, who seems to have considered them worth "adopting" and who is probably the high priest of a new religion now.

As difficult a task as any I can think of is to keep to one phase, angle, issue or point of this prodigious subject, for it's as big as the Bible, as broad as the universe. Let's try another look at it:

A JEW is an Israelite, but an Israelite is not necessarily a Jew. Abraham was neither Jew nor Israelite. The Jews are descendants of the tribe of Judah, who was Jacob's, that is to say, Israel's, fourth son. The English-speaking nations, together with the Scandinavian, Saxon, Bavarian and certain others are descendants of the other, so-called "lost," ten tribes, who were carried away into captivity about 800 B. C. and settled in a country that came to be known as Scythia.

Those ten tribes never did get along well with the Jews or Judah-ites, whom they despised and were often at war with. The ten tribes included the tribe of Dan. The tribe of Dan had several characteristics, one of which was that they were sea-farers, another that they liked to leave their name wherever they went, and a third that they were rather more prone to piracy and raiding in general than even any of the other rascals were who made up that amazing group of mother-nations descended from Jacob's sons.

THE tribe of Dan had established colonies in the Isles of the Seas long before the invasion of Canaan by the Assyrians. The Isles of the Seas were Great Britain and Ireland. They are repeatedly referred to in Old Testament writings. The tribe of Dan's "long ships" used to sail there regularly. So did the ships of the Philistines, who established rival colonies, worshiping Baal and naming such places as Ballyshannon, which is Baal-Shannon, after their horrible deity.

Heremon is a Hebrew-root word. The Heremon who became king of Ireland and married Zedekiah's daughter, thus providing for the continuance of the royal line of David in accordance with prophecy, was undoubtedly either an Israelite or descended from an Israelite who emigrated in one of those long ships.

When the Assyrians carried off the ten tribes into captivity they did not find them so easy to keep as to capture. They refused to stay put. Their route across Europe was blazed, and has continued blazed, by that enterprising tribe of Dan, who left their tribe name all over the place. There are scores of instances: The rivers Don (Dan), "D(a)niester, D(a)neever, Danube—Denmark, which is Danmark or the country of the Danes, or Dans—place-names such as Danebrog. They are easy to find on the map. Taken in the aggregate and studied in the light of the Old Testament, they constitute evidence which nothing much less turgid than pig-headed scholasticism can obscure.

THE tribes, of course, intermingled, but certain of their characteristics have continued in certain countries, together with the most astonishing coincidences: such, for example, as the fact that the arms of the United States are exactly those of the tribe of Manasseh! England is the tribe of Ephraim. The arms of the King of England, who is descended from King David and who therefore actually is by heritage a Jew, include the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the Harp of David. They say the word Saxon means Isaacson.

Throughout the Old Testament the prophecy is made repeatedly that the "throne" shall remain in Judah—that is to say, in the keeping of the Jews. It was also prophesied that there should never cease to be a descendant of David on the throne of David. That leaves those who take the Bible literally in an awkward predicament unless they accept the explanation that the stone under the coronation chair in Westminster Abbey is the same on which David was anointed king. It is a fact that in every generation since any sort of history was written a king has been crowned on it. It also is a fact that the kings of England are anointed, although doubtle s less oil is used nowadays than formerly.

BUT hang it, I have only touched on the subject. If you're interested in the fulfilment of prophecy there are scores of books, including Redding's "The Three Churches," which is very scarce, and the same author's "Mysteries Unveiled."

As I said, Beauchamp conducts a magazine devoted to that subject exclusively. He calls it *The Watchman of Israel*, and the subscription price is only a dollar a year or so. There are authorities who link up the Great Pyramid with all this and who claim to interpret the peculiar pyramid marks as corroborative of the Old Testament and the "inside" history of the English-speaking people.

TO WRITE the whole story in one volume would be a task as great as Wells' history, and at that would leave the job just plowed up ready for the next man.

I would like nothing better than to handle it as fiction and construct a story out of it. But where should a fellow begin? And how go on? And where's the end of it? Besides, how many are there who really care enough for adventure in the realm of fact to stomach the ancient names and all the Bible references that would be essential?

To me the Old Testament is a library of gorgeous

entertainment. But I would hate to inflict my views on it on an *Adventure* audience without permission. And even if I had permission I rather doubt that I possess the energy and skill required to make an entertaining tale of that four-thousand-year-long and ten-nations Odyssey.—TALBOT MUNDY.

A letter bearing on the death-dealing powers of the Ark of the Covenant:

New York City.

Yesterday I met a Hebrew scholar, born in Palestine and but one year in this country. I related the gist of Mr. Mundy's *Adventure* letter to him and he informed me that he had heard the same story before leaving Palestine. He was inclined to believe it.

I found the following in Rev. Robert Taylor's "The Devil's Pulpit":

"We are told that the magnetic needle, the mariner's compass, was first discovered by the Venetian Marco Polo, in the year 1260. But the priests of Jupiter Ammon carried the magnet with them, in a compass box, as the Ark of the Covenant of their God, which it was death for the unsanctified to look into."—LEON RAINS.

Another letter advancing the theory that history is exactly fulfilling the ancient prophecies:

Omaha, Nebraska.

The enclosed is based on history and prophecy and may interest Camp-Fire. Cut out any part you do not like.

I notice they are filling the gaps in the Pan-American R. R. Some 45 miles southeastward from Salvador were opened for business a few days ago, which ought to carry it as far as Lake Nicaragua or thereabouts. Some 25,000 people were present at the opening. Several years ago Nicaragua wanted to build south from Managua to the Costa Rica boundary, but I don't know what, if anything, they have done. This would carry the southern terminal to Port Limon, C. R., about 200 miles west of Colon. It is hard work to arouse our people to appreciate the necessity of completing the line to Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro—east of the Andes, at once, or as soon as possible to do so.

I WAS much interested in reading Mr. Talbot Mundy's comment concerning the "Anglo-Saxon people." He says somewhere about 800 B. C. the Ten Tribes were carried off into captivity by Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, from whence they migrated northward and spread all over Europe. Usher's chronology gives this date as 721 B. C. and II Kings XVII, 6th, says "In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Babor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes." This was in the region South of the Caspian Sea and east of the Tigris River, northeast of Babylon, and northwest of the Persian Gulf in the land of Cuth or Cuthah. They were replaced in Samaria by men from Babylon, Hanath, Sepharraim, Avah and Cuthah. These places are, in some cases, easily found on the ancient maps.

The Cuthah were the descendants of Ham, through Cush, the father of Nimrod the mighty hunter, the beginning of whose kingdom was Babel (Babylon) Erech, Aecad and Calneh in the land of Shinar. At a later date they evidently migrated through southern Arabia to Africa and settled in Ethiopia (Abyssinia) along the Red Sea, on the South of the other Hamite colony of Mizraim in Egypt. In the reign of David they were known as Cushites, and "The Cush" was one of the messengers to the king announcing the death of Absalom. The meaning of "Cush" is "black" or "blacka-moor," hence by striking off the prefix "blacka" we may be able to identify them as the modern Moors in the land of Morocco, hence it is easy to believe in the existence of an Israelitish colony, among others, in the British isles—England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, with travel and traffic communications with Phenicia, Egypt, Philistia and Israel by sea.

AS TO the captivity of the Ten Tribes, one of the books of Esdras says they left the land of their captivity, moving through Arzareth or Ararat—(Armenia), through the passes of the mountains into a land where they were free to worship God, where they remained in large numbers in Russia and the Caucasus. As Russia is or was known as "the land of the north" and "the land of the great prince," both Jeremiah and Zechariah predict they are to return to the land of their fathers from "the land of the north." Daniel 12.1 speaks of "Michael the great prince," who announced himself as the friend of the Israelites, and predicts their release, from captivity at the end of the great tribulation now prevailing in Russia "the land of the north" and "the land of the great prince." Under the empire these people were designated as Israelites and all of them were registered, or as Daniel 12.1 says, "At that time thy people shall be delivered (from their oppressions), every one that shall be found written in the book."

As to the return of the children of Israel, Hosea says they shall abide many days without a king and without a prince and without a sacrifice and without an image and without an aphod and without teraphim, and in the latter days shall seek the Lord their God, and David their king. And they shall be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head—for great shall be the day of Jezreel in the valley of Megiddo—modernized as Armageddon.

In the sixth Chapter the prophet states when the restoration of Israel is to be, thus, "after two days will He revive us; in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight." Taking the Biblical day as a thousand years, this period will cover three thousand years. These years being Scriptural, with 360 days to the year, and 3,000 years from some notable event in the history of Israel, we find according to one chronologer that David became king of Israel and Judah, as one kingdom, in 1049 B. C. Deducting 1049 years from 3,000 leaves 1951 (Scriptural) years. Reduce this to our calendar of 365¼ days per year, we have—1951x360 days=702,360 days ÷ 365¼=1922 years 11 months and some days, or, say, about November, 1922, A. D., when Israel will begin as an organized government.

ANOTHER way to interpret this prophecy is to consider 2⅔ of the 3,000 years as past from which deduct 721 B. C. the date of Hoshea's surrender, leaves 1945 Scriptural years, reduced as

follows: 1945x360 days=700,200 days ÷ 365¼= 1917 years—when the work of restoration began, according to the prophecy of our Savior as to "the end of the times of the Gentiles"—when on December 10, 1917, Allenby entered Jerusalem and put an end to the oppressions of the Turks. "The times of the Gentiles" were symbolized by the Seven Times Jacob bowed down before Esau (Gen. 33.3) a time consisting of the prophetic year of 360 years—making 360x7=2520 years these times were to continue with Israel subject to the Gentiles. They began about 603 B. C. (our time) or about 610 B. C. Scriptural time, when the king of Egypt dethroned the king of Judah and carried him captive to Egypt and Judah lost its independence, making the term of "the times of the Gentiles" thus 2520—603=1917, A. D. This is verified by the 1335 days (Dan. 12) which are 1335 Mohammedan years. Reduced to our time, the period is 1295 years, a month and 24 days. The Mohammedan year 1335 expired October 16, 1917, leaving an overplus of 14 days in November and 10 days in December to complete the period of "1335 days." The Mohammedan era began in 622 A. D., to which add 1295 years, one month and 24 days and the resulting date is December, 10, 1917, A. D. These three prophecies are especially important, as to the restoration of Israel.

IN "BEN HUR" Lew Wallace refers to the Ark of the Covenant as being shut up in a cave in Mount Nebo and the entrance closed so none could find it. In one of the books of the Maccabees (apocryphal) the story is told at length, with Jerenuah informed that the Ark is to remain in its hiding-place until Israel is restored. I am inclined to believe Mr. Mundy is in error when he speaks of the extinction of the male line of David by the murder of the sons of Zedekiah. David had a number of sons, other than Solomon, among whom was Nathan, the next oldest brother to Solomon. Nathan was not of the reigning line. But his descendants were of more than passing importance when Zechariah says (12, 11, 12) "the family of the house of David shall be set apart and the family of the house of Nathan shall be set apart." As we turn to the genealogy of our Savior, as given by Luke, we find He was of the house of Nathan, the son of David and jointly through Zorobabel the Son of Salathiel, of the line of Solomon, as written by Matthew.

AS FOR the rulers of Great Britain descending through the marriage of the daughter of Zedekiah to King Heremon of Ireland, through the influence of Jeremiah, tradition says Jeremiah died in Ireland. But history says he was carried to Egypt by the Jews, after the destruction of Jerusalem, where he was put to death. As to the British being the People of the Covenant, there is good ground for such a belief in the parable of the wicked husbandmen, when our Savior, as he was teaching in the temple, said to the Pharisees, the chief priests and the elders of the people, "The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

THE mission of Israel was to lead the world. The kingdom was given to them to place them above all the nations of the earth. They rejected it. Ultimately it was given to the British Empire, whose long career in spreading Christianity and civilization justifies this belief. It shared this honor with the United States when our great President uttered the sublime precept: "the world must be made safe for democracy" which finally made three empires bite the dust and pass into oblivion as accursed, while the devils of imperialism, Cæsarism and fanaticism were driven from the earth by the triumphant hosts of republican liberty.

Israel in its blindness rushed to Calvary and was ruined. But, in "the regeneration" (Math. 19.28) so near at hand, this blindness will be removed, and as a nation it will rise again with a king or prince of the house of David governing his people while the Son of man sitting in the throne of his glory at Jerusalem shall rule the world in liberty, peace and justice.

"For out of Zion shall come forth the laws and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem!"—E. F. TEST.

WHO knows the number on the gun Billy the Kid carried when he was captured?

Wilson, Oklahoma.

I have a few pieces of kindling for the old, but good Camp-Fire. About myself, I am from Louisiana, and the shores of the broad Mississippi River. The only real adventure I've had was in the jungle of Panama, the Chepo River in and around Agua Dulce, R. de P. The greatest adventure I ever had was drowning in the Panama Canal and being pulled out by a Mr. Spillman of Cheyenne, Wyoming. My next trip is Russia or China if my plans work right.

The main idea of this butting into Camp-Fire is to find out of any of its members can tell me Billy the Kid's pistol number. I saw a .45 Colt single action, model 1871 or 1872; the owner claimed that this gun was owned by Billy The Kid when captured.— —— ——.

THE rope trick. A word from one of our writers' brigade on this interesting stunt:

San Francisco.

I've just-finished the June 10th *Adventure*, which contains Mr. W. E. Besson's inquiry regarding the famous "rope trick" of the Indian jugglers. If a bit of dope drawn from memory and not capable of substantiation at this time is admissable, I'll unburden my chest of the account of my own encounter with this yarn:

SOME ten years ago I got hold of a book of travel —one of Mayne Reid's, I *think*—in which was a description of the trick as follows:

A fakir and a boy appeared in the streets of Calcutta (?) carrying a large covered basket. When a crowd had gathered, the fakir produced from the basket a rope and a big knife. The rope he coiled and heaved upward, and one end went out of sight and stayed, while he held the "bitter end" in his hand.

The boy, at a signal from his master, climbed the rope hand-over-hand and disappeared. A few moments later the fakir called for the boy to come down, but received no answer. He called several times and at last, apparently irritated by the boy's silence, placed the knife between his teeth and himself ascended the rope; disappeared. From above

came a blood-curdling yell, then in rapid sequence the severed arms, legs, head of the boy hurtled to the ground, followed finally by the hacked trunk. The fakir descended rapidly, his knife dripping blood. He gathered together the pieces of the body and placed them in the basket, covering it again. After a mumbled incantation he opened the basket and *out stepped the boy, unhurt!*

THAT'S the account I read—and wondered over. But a little later—in the same year—I came upon a description of the trick in some magazine. It purported to be an *exposé* of the trick.

An Englishman, who had heard of the feat, who was a dabbler in mesmerism and hypnotism, waited for a fakir to appear. One came and the theater was a street lined with blank walls—so that none but the immediate assembly, which was to a man under the fakir's influence, might see(?)—and the Englishman, with a camera, found a hole in the wall behind the fakir. He took picture after picture and, when the fakir had finished and gone, questioned as many of the spectators as possible. Without exception these described the performance much as it is described above. *But* the pictures, covering every moment of the performance, revealed only the crowd gaping fixedly upward, while the fakir and his boy-assistant *stood quietly by the basket on the ground.*

Mesmerism of the spectators *en masse* was the explanation advanced by the Englishman. He was not susceptible to mesmeric influence, he stated, and so was the only person to witness the performance who "saw just what he saw" and not what the fakir made him believe he saw.

I WISH I had the names of the book and magazine from which the above are taken. But there was no reason at time of reading to think of this point and I made no notes. But I'd be willing to take oath that I've given here the essence of the two accounts; they made a marked impression upon me and my memory, I'm told, is "inconveniently long."

Whether or not the *exposé* of the trick was authentic, I *would* like to learn. Perhaps both accounts are mere travelers' tales on a par with Herodotus' account of the crocodiles' tears. *¿Quién sabe?* At any rate, I know that *some*where in the books is mention of this particular trick and what I saw surely others of Camp-Fire saw also. Some of the experts on mesmerism might also be able to say whether or not such group-mesmerism is possible.—EUGENE CUNNINGHAM.

YOU'LL remember I asked you for opinions as to the "blurbs" following titles on our contents pages and in "Trail Ahead" when we began cutting out even more of the "ballyhoo" than formerly. Quite a number of you responded and we went over the "vote" carefully. The majority favored having the "blurbs" restricted, as now, to a brief suggestion of the general nature of the story, but there were many opinions, all the way from the majority opinion to a frank liking for paragraphs of "ballyhoo" as to what good and interesting stories they are. The majority, too, were for a bit of "ballyhoo" in "Trail Ahead," through against it on the contents pages. All in all, we believe we've now got the form for both places that most of you prefer. Any time you want it otherwise a majority of opinion will get what you want.

OUR Camp-Fire stations are spreading steadily over the map, but plenty of room exists for more. Help make them grow.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club or resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

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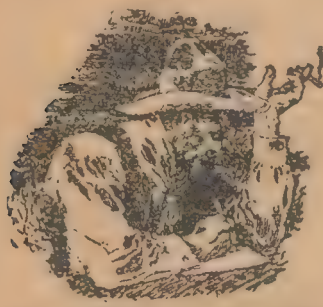
Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.



QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service (except our assaying and oil services) free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1, 2. The Sea. In Two Parts
3, 4. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
5, 6. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
7. Australia and Tasmania
8. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
9. New Guinea
10. Philippine Islands
11. Hawaiian Islands and China
12. Japan
13. Asia, Southern
14—20. Africa. In Seven Parts
21. Turkey and Asia Minor
22, 23. Balkans. In Two Parts
24. Scandinavia
25. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
26, 27. South America. In Two Parts
28. Central America
29, 30. Mexico. In Two Parts
31—37. Canada. In Seven Parts
38. Alaska
39. Baffinland and Greenland
40—45. Western U. S. In Six Parts
46—49. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
50—53. Eastern U. S. In Four Parts
Our Assaying and Oil Services
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Old Songs That Men Have Sung
Fishing in North America
Mountains and Mountaineering
Standing Information

Two-Bladed Knives

A WICKED addition to anybody's armament, looks like:

Question:—"I note in 'Ask Adventure' that you kindly offer to give information in regard to antique edged weapons, and I am presuming to impose upon your good nature.

I have a double-bladed weapon which was willed to me by a friend. I did not know that he owned it, and I have no idea where he got it.

It is 21 inches long. The blades are 1⅓ inch wide at the broadest place. Both blades are thin, and sharp on both edges.

Both sides of both blades are covered with inscriptions, which are raised above the surface. Evidently from the appearance of the metal the background was etched away.

The surface of the steel was rusted when the weapon came to me, and from its appearance I do not think it was ever highly polished.

The handle, between the two blades, is of a greenish-white bone, the like of which I have never seen before. It is carefully finished, but not highly polished. On each side of the handle is engraved a row of circles, with a dot in the center, about one-fourth of an inch in diameter.

The sheaths are evidently of rawhide of some sort, covered with what looks like cheetah skin—tawny yellow fur with small black spots. This fur, though evidently very old and much worn, has never been attacked by moths.

The blades look very old, and are of primitive workmanship, though the lettering is bold and free, and drawn by no uncertain hand. If you will examine the black-lead tracing which I am enclosing you will see that the inscription is the repetition of one word, over and over again. I do not know the language, though it looks something like Turkish, or possibly Jagatai, or even Persian.

The surfacing of the blades is much like that of a Turkish boarding-cutlas now in my possession, which was presented to my father by Gen. Grant.

I would much like to know your opinion on the nationality of this weapon, and the probable limiting dates of its manufacture. Also the kind of fighting it was used in, and against what sort of weapon it was used in defense.

Ancient weapons interest me much if I know something of their history and method of use in offense and defense. Collecting them is a fine avocation in which, I understand, you are an adept.

I have a straight double-edged sword, on one side of which is engraved in fifteenth-century Spanish, "Draw me not without cause," and on the other side, "Sheath me not without honor." Do you know if the engraving of mottoes was common on Spanish arms of that period? Have you ever seen the above mottoes on a sword-blade, and if so, of what country and period?

Thank you much for any information you can give on the above matters.

Drop in and see me whenever you have nothing better to do. My office is near South Station.

Stamped, self-addressed envelop enclosed."—ALLAN V. GARRATT, Boston, Mass.

Answer, by Mr. Barker:—As to the double-bladed weapon you speak of, I think it is in all probability Persian, and its date may be any time, probably prior to 1800. As to what kind of fighting it was used in, that is impossible for me to say with any certainty.

Demmin does not mention or give an illustration of such a weapon, nor do the illustrations of the Meyrick Collection contain one. One was sold at auction in New York in 1914 for $5.75, a sketch of which I enclose. (No. 1.)

It was there described as a "TWO-BLADED REVERSE CURVED DAGGER, with bone handle in center, one side engraved with Hebrew characters, the other with Arabian, blades curved outward in opposite directions, each 9 inches long, triangular in shape, scabbards of leather. Length 23 inches."

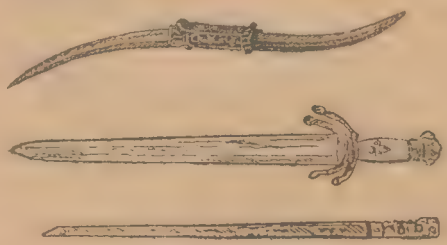
Blades and scabbards seem to differ from yours.

The engraving of mottoes was common on Spanish arms. I have seen a Spanish officer's saber, the blade being Solingen, made by Schimelbush & Foest, on which is engraved in Spanish—

"Draw me not without a Reason, nor Sheath me with Dishonor."

I am enclosing a sketch (No. 2) of a short, heavy Spanish sword, bearing date of 1818, on the double-edged blade of which is, in Spanish—

"Draw me not without reason, nor sheath me with dishonor."



SEE TEXT FOR DESCRIPTIONS

Also a sketch (No. 3) of a very ancient Spanish sword with a very curious hilt, made of solid silver, with places to fit the fingers. It has a very broad blade, grooved on both sides, on one side of which is, in Spanish—

"Draw me not without reason, nor sheath me with dishonor."

I shall certainly do myself the pleasure of dropping in and seeing you, and arrange to have you come out to my house and see my few pieces.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in alternate issues of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Just Floatin'

WISH I could slough this magazine job for six months and go along:

Question:—"I want information on the following points.

It is understood that the following questions apply to boats without propelling force other than oars or sweeps.

Is the middle of September too late to leave Pittsburgh and float down to New Orleans?

If so, would it be advisable to start from St. Louis?

What is the approximate time to float from Pittsburgh to Cairo, floating days only?

Same from St. Louis to New Orleans?

Is it safe to float nights, with lights but with no watch?

Will "current boards" keep a floating boat in the channel?"—EDWARD FRENCH, M. D., Boston, Mass.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—You could leave Pittsburgh in September and make the Gulf by tripping the Ohio, but I'd have my doubts about the Ohio River without a little power—an outboard motor, say. There are long pools above the Ohio River dams, and you'd have to lock through about forty of the dams, which enable steamers to run in low-water periods. St. Louis would be better, for then

you have the river current all the way down, four to seven miles an hour.

A day's float would be about forty miles. You would be able to drop down about four days a week, on the average, working down comfortably. Say New Orleans in about seven or eight weeks. You could jam through in less time. I took all Winter—seven months—to make this trip down, but I just sauntered along, went over to St. Francis River for 250 miles, and down Chaffelli.

I shouldn't advise night floating without a watch. It is done by old river-men on a *falling* stage of the river, which keeps the boat in mid-stream, a rising stage throwing the boat to the bank. You might meet a fleet of tow barges and be rolled under them, which happens. I floated nights when the day-winds prevailed, but kept watch. It's an eery experience!

Never heard of any one using current boards, or sea-anchors, except that in winds, shanty-boaters in a hurry run into the drift and make fast, and are towed down. This is dangerous if the driftwood is swirling and the boat is caught in a squeeze.

I'm enclosing a slip that'll help you a little. Come again, if I'm needed.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose* full *return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Stock-Raising in Australia

FINE opportunities there still:

Question:—"Having seen your address in "Ask Adventure" columns of *Adventure* magazine, as one who answers queries regarding Australia and its resources, I am taking the privilege of writing you.

I am interested in the stock industry in Australia. Have had ten years' experience in ranch life in North Dakota and Montana, U. S. A. I would like to get in touch with some of the leading stockmen of your country. Can furnish reference of any kind regarding character and ability."—JOHN W. PATTERSON, Fort Mills, Philippine Islands.

Answer, by Mr. Goldie:—Stock-raising land in Australia is usually divided into first, second, and third class grades. As in all other new countries, the richer soil was the first to be occupied and worked to advantage. In many districts it proved that only the first class would pay under the then existing circumstances; but as conditions improved, second-class country became as desirable as the first-class had originally been. Then the third-class came into occupation, and in turn proved profitable because it was secured at low values and had been brought within easy communication with markets.

In the most closely settled States, such as Victoria and Tasmania, the greater extent of the land is held under freehold, and the newcomer who desires to secure property will find it best to buy an improved place, or, better still, to purchase some good grazing-land which is still subject to considerable improvement. If he has moderate means, the buyer can make a fair profit on his capital, while he continues to increase the value of his holding.

Well-fenced and watered sheep or cattle country, provided with a homestead, may be bought in these States at from 4 to 8 pounds per acre according to its carrying capacity; while properties in first-class order and capable of grazing two sheep to the acre cost considerably more. Usually these are comparatively small, and a good deal of cultivation is carried on by the holders. It is on such places as these, however, that a skilful stock-breeder may make money and accumulate property.

Like all good things, the best of the grazing-estates in Tasmania and Victoria must be paid for, but once established and with the right class of stock in the paddocks, the enterprising breeder from the old country soon makes good on his purchase.

What can be accomplished on small sheep-holdings has been demonstrated by the merino sheep-breeders of midland Tasmania. Here many of the old families have carried on flocks of the finest merino for many years. They raise thousands of stud sheep and send them to the mainland for sale.

The Tasmanian sheep were introduced into hundreds of the largest flocks in the other States, and sheep-breeding in Australia owes much to the group of accomplished breeders in the little island. Flocks of one thousand to two thousand sheep, kept up to a high standard, have been sufficient to maintain their owners in the position of small pastoral kings. In other parts of the island, splendid herds of cattle have been reared and maintained on small holdings, and have kept prosperous families on the land.

In Victoria there is still some leased country, and there are thousands of acres of grazing-land that offer opportunities to the buyer who has pastoral instincts, and prefers stock-keeping to the more arduous agricultural operations.

North from Victoria, on the Murray River, into the southern pastoral districts of New South Wales, a great extent of sheep country stretches away west, and east into the mountains, which stand back from the coast. Throughout this wonderful stretch of pasturage there are great productive grazing-properties which carry from one sheep to an acre to three sheep to two acres. The newcomer, in his search for land, will find large estates varying in value from 4 to 7 pounds per acre.

Provided that he is in a position to finance the purchase of land and stock, he can not fail with good management to make any of these properties pay very handsomely. There are also chances of securing land on lease from the Government, and others of acquiring a partly improved portion of a large run which is being cut up by the owners or subdivided after resumption by the State.

The stock-breeder from older countries finds conditions in Australia almost completely the reverse of those to which he has been accustomed. All animals live in the open air in this wonderful climate the year round. With the exception of certain stock, such as special studs, working horses, and perhaps the "house" cows, all the animals feed solely on the sweet pastures of the country.

The newcomer wonders at what he considers to be the insufficient steading about the country homes in Australia. It is soon explained to him that no buildings are needed for housing animals in the Winter, and this mainly accounts for the difference in the size of a live-stock establishment in Australia and one in a cold country.

As a matter of course, the working conditions also differ to a considerable extent. Much less labor is required to work the same number of cattle or sheep, and most of the work is in the open paddocks. A direct consequence of this is that one man can

attend to a large number of animals. There are yearly operations, such as lamb-marking and shearing, and cattle-mustering and branding, while in between, the animals are worked from paddock to paddock according to the condition of the pastures.

"Fats" come on much more irregularly than in a country where hand feeding is universal, but stock fatten very quickly on the rapid flushes of grass and herbage which come in good seasons. The animals make amazing progress from birth to maturity, unless they get a very severe check. The system is thus almost as simple as that on the cattle ranches of Texas and the Argentine.

Most stock-owners in Australia stock lightly because of the variations in the seasons. As a rule, when the pastures are very good, the broad acres could carry many more animals than are grazed upon them, but the long-headed stockmen are satisfied to keep them in good condition, and conserve the grass for recurring periods of dry weather.

On his tours of inspection, which are usually necessary before he can settle down, the land-seeker acquires a great deal of knowledge of the country which is essential to his career as a pastoralist. He soon learns to distinguish sheep from cattle country, and picks up many wrinkles on the management of all classes of stock in Australia. Information on the value of water conservation is impressed upon him.

Except in Western Australia, where, on extensive pastoral areas, scrub and small timber are necessary to augment the carrying capacity of the country, he sees the advantage gained by killing the exhausting green timber and cleaning up the surface of the land as the dry timber falls. The experienced Australian pastoralist will take him in hand on train and motorcar journeys, and freely impart to him the tips he has gained in years of pioneering in the country.

Having at last made his selection and secured his property, which may be 2,000 or 10,000 acres in extent according to his means, his ambitions, and the class of country he prefers, his first year will be almost solely devoted to making decisions as to the best means of working his place and of following such operations as he can compass. If he has purchased an improved property he will learn how to use the paddocks, water supply and other improvements on the best scheme for keeping his stock in condition. As a general rule, he will discover that to make the best of his holding he needs to complete the improvements.

Starting on an improved place, however, the new owner has a great advantage in being able to work his stock to immediate profit. He can devote most of his time and his resources to the actual management of his sheep or cattle, and the place begins to produce for him from the jump.

On the other hand, if he begins on partially improved property, the principal improvement is likely to be the killing of most of the timber and the erection of part of a ring fence. He may secure a tank or a well or two; but on the other hand the place may at first be waterless. So the new settler must hustle into fencing, tank or well sinking, and the erection of a house and some steading. The principal advantage he has in this country over the man who takes up virgin acres is that the native grass and herbage are well established because the timber has been killed in part, and these respond to a moderate rainfall with a lively growth of healthy feed.

Therefore the place can be stocked up immediately, and a lambing and a clip of wool may be expected in the first year of occupation.

The operations in making a home, in subdividing the holding, securing a water supply, breaking up a paddock with a plow, and raising wheat or oats, or hay and grain for his horses, establishing a small herd of milkers for the family supply of milk and butter, will be simple enough to an experienced stockman coming from the old country. As the most urgent jobs are completed, a vegetable garden and a small orchard are added to the supplying areas. When the new man in Australia reaches this stage, he is beginning to settle down to the comfortable life of a landed proprietor.

Among the leading stock agents of this country are: Dalgety & Co., Ltd., Sydney; the Cooperative Wool and Produce Co., Ltd., Sydney; the New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency Co., Ltd., with head offices in New Zealand and branches all over Australia; Chisholm & Co., Sydney; Cramsey & Lithbridge, Ltd., Sydney; Hill, Clark & Co., Sydney; and Winchcombe Carson, Ltd., Sydney. There are many others, but if you apply to any of these firms you will no doubt get all the information you require regarding your chances in this industry in Australia.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

A Hotel Built on a Gold-Mine

ALSO some tips about bear-hunting and placer mining:

Question:—"A couple of friends recently asked me to write you for some information on hunting and placer mining in western Montana.

I spent a few weeks in the old Virginia Creek diggings, but know nothing of any place that seemed to suit them. What they want is to find out best time for bear and also a *good* bear country—they figure on using a car to within fifty miles of hunting-ground if possible and pack in from car. Can you give any information as to such a place and description of country surrounding?

As to the place: They want to know if you know of any place in western Montana where the country hasn't been worked over too much. Enough so they could work without feeling that older hands had been in and got disgusted and quit. Any information you can give on either subject will be appreciated. If this goes to *Adventure* don't publish name or address.

P. S.—Both of these men are able to rough it to the limit."

Answer, by Mr. Davis:—It's a pretty hard proposition to combine a bear-hunt with a placer-mining proposition. I am afraid the time is past when the combination that will be productive of results is to be found in the State.

The region between Flathead Lake and the Continental Divide is reported to be a first-class bear country. A good way to reach it is to go to Ovando in Powell County, outfit there and hit the trail northeasterly fifty or sixty-five miles.

Bear are now coming out of Winter quarters.*

*This was written April 14, 1922.

How do you contemplate hunting them? Some trappers use bait and then trap them, others use dogs to find them and then take a chance with a rifle. If you are going to use neither dogs nor bait the chance of bringing home the bear is considerably reduced. The bear may be around, but you are just as apt not to run on to them.

If you want the names of reliable guides write C. A. Jakways, State Fish and Game Warden, Helena, Montana. Horses can be rented at Ovando.

I don't know of any place in western Montana where the placer ground has not been worked over. I do not believe you will find any such place in the U. S. You write, "Enough so they could work without feeling that older hands had been in and got disgusted and quit." The mere fact that older hands have worked placer ground does not necessarily indicate that all the gold has been taken.

Eight years ago a new hotel was constructed in Helena on Main Street which occupies the site of Last Chance Gulch, where the placer miners worked in the sixties and extracted something like $30,000,000. The contractor who excavated for the foundation hauled the ground away, washed it in sluice-boxes and made a tidy sum of money. It happened that the old-time placer miners didn't work the ground thoroughly. There are large areas of so called placer ground in various parts of western Montana which contain gold and which according to report might be profitable if dredged on a large scale.

Years ago there was placer mining on Nevada Creek, Powell County, a few miles south of Ovando. Within recent years there have been some dredge and hydraulic placer mining done on Cedar Creek, south of Superior, which is in Sanders County. There is also some placer mining at the head of the St. Joe River in Idaho across the range from Superior. There is conisderable placer mining ground near Libby, Lincoln County. The most recent placer proposition of which the writer has heard is in Park County near the Yellowstone Park.

More about the Napo Country

IT'S on the eastern slope of the Andes in Ecuador. One thing Mr. Young omitted to mention in his answer, by the way, is that this territory, or a good big chunk of it, is in dispute. Ecuador has it now; but suppose it is awarded to Colombia or Peru; then will the settlers' titles be any good?

Question:—"I read with interest a letter of yours in a recent issue of *Adventure*, which fell into my hands in Moji, Japan. In fact my interest was so great that I wrote at once to the Mr. Felton you speak of at Napo, Oriente, Ecuador, requesting information.

I at present hold a master's certificate, tonnage and oceans unlimited, and stand a small chance of getting command in the near future.

But the sea game has been getting on my nerves for the past few years, and I have looked for a chance to settle down and try to make a stake. If the prospects are as good in Ecuador as they appear I should like to go.

I have sufficient funds to take me south and to provide a working capital upon arrival.

I have a fair knowledge of the Spanish language "as it is spoken," picked up on the coast of Chile. I seem to be understood.

I have some knowledge of farming, a relic of my youth before the lure of the bounding main, etc., snared me.

Now my question is: What are the prospects as you see them? If I did go what would I be able to buy South? What should I carry along? To tell you the truth what I want is a complete little book of information if you can write it.

Before I close I would say I am writing for information. I do not know if I shall leave the sea; I may but I am not certain; perhaps if things look good enough—who knows?

If this letter should be published I would request that my name and address be withheld."

Answer, by Mr. Young:—I have read your letter with interest. Quite a number of folks were interested in that Ecuador country, and I have received letters from all parts of the U. S. and Canada from men who wish to try it a whirl. Capt. Helms (former President of the Ajax Tire Co.) has already gone, and others have either gone or will go. It looks as if that counrty will soon be opened up unless something happens.

The reason the chances have been so good is the fact that there was a small empire over there which was given over to primitive nature and a few red men and a couple of white men. These Indians are as tame as rabbits, although several hundred miles due south there are some bad Indians (Jiveros) who are the other extreme. There is some mighty fine country over there, and after a man once gets across the mountains and down them a couple of days he can sit and float for a matter of six hundred miles in a canoe at the rate of a hundred miles per day. What stuff that is taken out of the country usually goes in this manner, and the Indians pole and paddle back up in about two weeks.

I have heard that there is a launch line or two running up as far as Napo from Iquitos now. With one of these light-draft boats that has the propeller housed up inside of the boat and draws the water up by a vacuum created by a stand-pipe from which the air has been pumped, a man could go right on up above Napo with a good-sized boat. I think the name of the company making these boats is the Shallow Draft Boat Corpn. You can get their name from the Board of Trade of the U. S., at Washington, D. C. They make a canal-boat that only draws eight inches of water, and at the Motor Show they had a small launch running on a half-inch of water. Two of their boats have been shipped to Brazil for use on shallow rivers. The Napo and Cururay are big rivers after you get down them for a day or two, but are not very large above Napo and a similar height on the Cururay.

I don't know what effect it will have on the Indian labor if a number of Americans should go down there and make the demand more than the supply. These Indians come in from the forest and take up with white men and hang around for their board and a tot of rum once a day. Darned queer place over there, and darned queer people. Humility is a part of their custom, and they ask to be whipped once a year with a switch for some wrong they have committed. Civilization may spoil them as it does every one else.

The average planter over there feels as if he isn't

doing much unless he has a few score of them around him. For my part I would be satisfied with a less number and a few modern machines and a hydro-electric plant in one of the streams.

There isn't much to tell about the country. You go to Guayaquil and then to Quito over the G. & Q. R. R. and ride a mule one day to Papallacta. From there she is shanks' mare stuff for about fifty-six miles; but she is a —— winder of a trail and will take you four or five days to make it. The Indians travel slow and pack about a hundred pounds all the way for $2.50 and board themselves.

Their women follow them for the first day and carry their coca (grub) for them.

After you get to the top of the mountain at Bajeza she's down-hill in a gradual slope for six hundred miles, and where the Napo enters the Amazon it is only about nine hundred feet above sea-level. She's barren at the top, and going down vegetation gets thicker and thicker until she is typical tropical jungle plus in the lowlands.

They don't have any Winter, only rain, and I'm here to tell the world that I prefer a tropical rainy season to one of these New York Winters with the temperature changing every day. The worst thing about trying to go over there during the rainy season is that the trail is bad and the Indians don't like to pack over it; but they do pack the mail at all seasons.

Near Napo there is an American; and down the river there are a Frenchman and a few white Spanish settlers. Up to the present they have had this vast country to themselves.

The G. & Q. R. R. is figuring on building a railroad over there from Riobamba, and if Capt. Helms has his way he will put a trolley line across the mountains for them. I had lunch with him before he left, and he sure felt the call of the primitive. He had on a diamond ring with a stone in it the size of a cherry; but he was longing for overalls and a month's growth of beard on his face. If you do go down there and run across him tell him "how" for me.

Fishing Stocked Ponds

THE more you preserve fish in order to angle for 'em, the wiser they get. Brother Thompson has doped out a way to fool Old Dame Instinct, but my guess is that the dodge won't work more than a few years in any one pond:

Question:—"Would like to have your advice on the best method and kind of baits to use for catching old stock of bass in small lake or pond. These ponds were stocked say twelve or fifteen years ago with bass. For a few seasons they were very easy to catch; but for the last four or five years they have been refusing to strike at either live bait or artificial bait of almost every variety.

These fish can be seen late of an afternoon close in to the shore but can not be persuaded to strike at any lure."—— ——, Walton, Ky.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—I have had the same experience as you with stocked ponds, but finally got bass striking. As fish grow up in a pond I am sure they feel the vibration from a man's movements on shore; also the small fish that feed in shoal water scare quickly at the presence of man and somehow or other transmit this to the other fish by their actions of getting into deep water.

I have studied this subject a great deal, and finally began wading. I got to where I wanted to cast, and after getting in the water never made any movement whatever for a long time. I am sure fish do not see you when you are waist deep in water as they do when you are on shore. I used the lightest artificial lures with the grooved heads that I could get. They went deep on fast reeling and brought out many a big fellow.

When using a fly rod often I had good results from a bucktail and an 0 spinner, the smallest size. I used many times with success the little fly-rod wooden plugs, and one of the best methods is to attach a dropper fly as usual and carry along the little plug as trailer. This looks like a minnow chasing a fly, and very few bass can resist it. Many ponds like yours are fine for late evening and night fishing. The best killers are bass bugs with fly rod, and any surface minnow. With it reel slowly, and you will have a fine thrill when they strike.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop. Exception: Our assaying and oil services.

Fancy and Fact in Polynesia

THEY'RE far apart when a man is without capital, especially when he's getting along in years:

Question:—"I am a workingman and filled up and a little tired (I'm 50 years old) of this eternal work, work, and slavery, that seems to be the result of civilization. I want to begin a new life, live everything and go where a man may get a living and does not have to worry for tomorrow all the time. South Sea Islands are the subjects of these questions.

Do you believe that there is a chance for a man that worked from South America to Alaska for his living, to make it there as a native?

Can a man get land there enough to live on? I do not want a plantation; it would mean grinding again.

What group of islands would you advise me to go to to take a look for that home?

Where can I get maps and literature on the South Sea Islands?

How much capital would you think is needed to get a start to live as a native, not as a capitalist?"—Gus Hamil, Ketchikan, Alaska.

Answer, by Mr. Charles Brown, Jr.:—You are a workingman, you say. You are fed up with the year-long grind and anxiety of modern civilization. Your only escape lies in spreading sail for the warm, blue waters of Polynesia, you believe.

You see an island valley with a little grass house hidden away in the green depths of the jungle. All about it are fruits and vegetables and flowers. And at the foot of the valley is a lagoon, sparkling through long hours of sun. Always it will yield you the choicest sea-foods. Never, never will it fail.

Far up in the cool of the valley run wild chickens and hogs and goats and cattle—yours, all yours, for the killing! You have but to call the happy, laughing islanders, and they lead you to the hunt. At dusk

you return heavily laden, to partake of the kill.

Then comes the moonlight, orange-colored and all-pervading. And with it the laughter and the singing of pretty, brown island girls, so that you forget almost entirely the loneliness and desolation of the bleak land in which you were a prisoner of circumstances.

Such is the picture your unhappy mind has painted. But, oh, my fellow creature, out on the beaches of Polynesia life can be as cruel as a prohibition officer, especially to the man who, in the twilight of his years, wants to turn native.

Now mark. When a happy, reckless South Sea vagabond, holding my own on breadfruit and fish and sleeping out on the decks of becalmed island schooners, I met up with all manner of beach-combers, men that had tired of civilization in much the same manner as you have done. This legion is knocking about with but one regret. Ever they curse the hour they turned their backs on the home of their fathers for an uncertain struggle under the Southern Cross. And always they whispered to me their one hope, spoke of the day when they would drift back to the lands so far above the line. Oh, my friend, the stories I could write of these "brethren of the beach!"

I do not want you to become one of that legion. Nor do I want to think of your plunging lower than a native. You must understand that to a native a beach-comber or white man that has gone native is less than the coral over which the island dogs run.

Can you get enough land to live on? Yes, if you have money—several hundred dollars. For in those island valleys cash has now become a medium of exchange, even amongst the "hospitable" natives.

"How much capital would you think is needed to get a start to live as a native, not as a capitalist?" Why, when a man "goes native," he does so because his purse is nothing more than a rag. If he had "capital," he would never turn to that life. Only when his resources fail, when he can not again get on his two feet, does he accept from the natives whatever they see fit to throw to him. Indeed, I have stripped the South Sea of its glamour. I'm cruel, am I not?

The enclosed form, "Cash Needed by All Guests on Tahiti Island," tells more about the thing I am driving at.

Frederick O'Brien has written two very readable books on French Oceania. "White Shadows in the South Seas" and "Mystic Isles of the South Seas" are published by the Century Company, New York City.

I wish from all my heart I could mail you a different sort of a reply. But, you can readily understand, one reason I conduct this section is to prevent men, especially men who have crossed the shadow line, from becoming one of that homeless legion.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Deux Rivières

IT'S hunting-country:

Question:—"I beg to ask information as to the country and kind of game found in the locality of De Riviere. Also give me your opinion of a .35 Remington rifle, pump or automatic, for moose and red deer. Can this be beaten for above game?"—GUY U. BLACKALL, Blyth, Ont., Can.

Answer, by Mr. Moore:—Deux Rivières (Two Rivers), eighteen miles or so east by south of Mattowa, on the main line of the C. P. R. and north of the C. N. R., is a very good locality for red deer and moose, although from its close proximity to Pembroke and countryside it is bound to be pretty well hunted. However, as this section lies north of Algonquin Park, and the park serves as a feeder of game for all the country that surrounds it, the Deux Rivières part will always have a fair share of game.

A better moose country is across the Ottawa from Deux Rivières and north to Lake Kippewa. The country is rough, rocky, hilly, with many little swamps, lakes, etc. There is considerable timber in there, and lumbering has been going for many years. Other game such as fox, wolves, bear, etc., are there but rapidly decreasing in numbers.

As regards the .35 caliber Remington rifle for deer and moose: I have never used a .35, but I notice the editor of "Guns and Ammunition" in *Rod and Gun in Canada* has this to say about a good moose rifle: "I would suggest the .303 British, the .30-1906 Winchester or Remington, the .35 *Remington Automatic*, or the .33 model 1886 Winchester for moose." In the same magazine Adam Moore, a New Brunswick guide of twenty-five years' standing, has a word in praise of the .35 caliber for "the big fellows." Whether the .35 can be beaten or not, is not for me to say. I know men who have shot and killed moose with the .22 hi-power, the .303 Ross sporting, and they will swear by their favorites.

As regards a good deer rifle my favorite is a .303 caliber. I've seen great work done with Ross and Savage.

Hoping I have given you the information you seek, I will be pleased to hear from you at any time, and if I can do anything for you, I will only be glad.

Free service (except our assaying and oil services) but we don't pay the postage to get it to you.

Other Waterproofing Recipes

TWO of 'em; both simple enough, too:

Question:—"I take your name from *Adventure* as being the person to whom to write with reference to camping, etc. I would appreciate it if you would send me a good recipe for waterproofing a tent."—C. SULLING, New York City.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—There are various methods for waterproofing tents. One of the best is a preparation consisting of sugar of lead and alum, equal parts, say about a pound of each to a gallon or more of tepid water. When dissolved put tent in soak in the solution, and when thoroughly saturated, hang up and dry. This will make a tent fairly waterproof, mildew-proof and to a certain extent fireproof.

Another way is to dissolve paraffin in gasoline, out of doors, then paint the preparation on the canvas. This will make a tent waterproof, but is not so easily applied, and a tent is more likely to catch fire from sparks from a camp-fire.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

745 Riverside Drive, New York.

ONE of the most interesting contributions to this department since I took hold of it is a letter from a dear old lady seventy-six years of age who has sent in as fine a bit of swashbuckling sea doggerel of a time long gone by, as ever came my way. Eleven verses in as clean-cut handwriting as you fellows would want to see. Here's the letter and the poem—they sure go together:

Edgett's Landing, Albert County,
New Brunswick, Canada.

Am sending you an old song which may be called a sea ditty—a doggerel affair in these days. It was composed about the time of happening (1791), as my father learned it in the year 1813, when he went to New York, a lad of seventeen. He used to sing it along with others when I was a little girl, until I learned it from hearing him. I am now an old woman of seventy-six and probably the only one in the world who knows this song. Wish I could send you the tune as well—a quaint old "come-all-ye" lyric.—MRS. GEORGE ESSLER.

Off with your hats, every mother's son of ye, to the oldest and liveliest member of the Camp-Fire! Does she belong? Well—I guess yes. Here's the poem:

The Bold Nor'westmen

Come, all ye bold Nor'westmen who plow the raging main—
Attend unto this tragedy while I relate the same;
'Tis of the *Lady Wellington*, at anchor where she lay
Off Queen Charlotte's Island northwest of Amerikay.

It was in the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one
Great numbers of wild savages on board of our ship did come,
And for to buy their furs of them our captain did begin,
But mark what followed after, before long time had been:

'Twas aft upon our quarter deck two arms-chests there did stand.
The keys had been left in them by our gunner's careless hand.
Those savages they seized them and of them made a prize.
Oh, Lord! We had no other arms for to defend our lives.

'Twas aft upon our quarter deck our captain he did stand
With twenty of those wild savages, their naked knives in hand;
Twenty of those wild savages, their naked knives they drew:
If he should flinch or budge an inch, ready to run him through.

Our captain, then perceiving this, he unto them did say—
"If you give back my keys again, great sums to you I'll pay."

But the savages, not fearing him, they all drew forth their knives,
Saying: "The ship, she's ours now! And you shall lose your lives."

Our captain, then perceiving this—the ship no longer ours—
He called unto his sailors bold, likewise his officers:
"Go down into my cabin, boys, some firearms you'll find there.
See that they are well loaded; mind that they don't miss fire."

Then down into his cabin we quickly did repair—
But to our sad misfortune no firearms we found there
Except a brace of pistols, two guns and one broadsword—
Then instantly we did agree: "Blow her up," it was the word.

Then to acquaint our captain we quickly did repair
And instantly he did agree: "Blow her up into the air."
Our powder was got ready, our gun-rooms opened wide,
Our souls committed to the Lord, our bodies to the tide.

Those savages perceiving this, they in our cabins rushed—
Our captain cried out, "Follow them," and after them we pushed.
Ninety of these wild savages we killed upon the floor;
As many more we wounded, and the rest jumped overboard.

Early on the next morning, just by the break of day,
Our captain called all hands on deck, our anchor for to weigh.
With our cannon and small arms we on their town did play,
Till they brought back those keys again which they had stole away.

Now come, all you bold Nor'westmen who plow the raging main—
Come listen to my tragedy while I conclude the same;
Beware of all wild savages, of them you'll find no end,
And they will strive to take your life when you have been their friend.

Comrade Edward E. C. Gibbs of Huntington, Penna., would like to be put on the track of a song that used to be popular among the boatmen of the Great Lakes about forty years ago. "Bound Away in the Twilight" is its name, and one of the verses listens like this:

We worked night and day till our fingers were sore,
And we cursed Escanaba and damned iron ore.

Russell Jacobs, a comrade Adventurer who works in a logging-camp out in Bryant, Wisconsin, writes me that he hears a lot of different songs only half-sung, such as a few words of a chorus, or a part of a

verse here and there. It gets on his nerves to listen to these uncompleted ballads, and he asks me to find the missing portions.

Russell, old scout, I'd feel more like going on a hunt for this stuff if you'd only put just one little two-cent stamp in your letter for a reply. It isn't the two cents, Russell, me boy—it's the fact that for every one man who thinks to enclose a stamped and addressed envelope in his letter to me, there are four or five who either forget it or are too dumlazy to do it; and just bechune us it makes me plumb weary. Hoffman tells me that I should just waste-basket all letters of this kind.

Well—annyhow—here are the titles of the songs that Jacobs wants: "California Joe," "The Wabash Cannon-Ball," "Upon the Big Eau Claire," "When the Work Is Done This Fall," "Sing Me a Song of the Sweet Sunny South," and "John Henry, the Steel Driving Man."

"California Joe" and "When the Work Is Done This Fall" will be found in Lomax's anthology, "Cowboy Songs," published by Macmillan & Co.

My thanks to comrade Neil H. Wilson of North Tonawanda for the "Alphabetical Chantey" and "The Braw Glen Wharple Hieland Men"—two bully good bits of swashbuckling verse we hope to print in *Adventure* in the near future.

Comrade J. M. B. (which is as near as he comes to his name in his letter) from somewhere over on Staten Island has also sent in a fine bit of deep-sea verse entitled "The Dreadnaught," which will shortly appear. A few more like these, comrades Wilson and J. M. B., and we'll have the makings of an *Adventure* anthology.

My hearty thanks and keen appreciation to several Adventurers who have sent in some mighty interesting stuff recently. I hope to use it all in the course of time. To comrade John J. Kenney of Somerville, Mass., for "The *Cumberland's* Crew," which appeared in the issue of August 20, 1922; to comrade Frank J. Parker, of Kelseyville, Calif., for "Aransas Bay" and "The Bold Dragoon;" to comrade Franklin W. Hall, of Houlton, Me., for "Wild Bill's Grave;" to comrade H. E. Greenough, of Dartmouth, N. S., for "The Bold Young Oysterman," "The Wonderful Crocodile," "The Poor Little Fisherman's Girl," "The Foggy Dew" and "There Was an Old Man in Dover;" to comrade Richard L. Hynds of Prairie City, Ore., for "The Grave of Bonaparte." This is real help, and I want every one of ye to know that I'm keenly alive to the interest you are taking.

Inquiries from several comrades for "Cowboy's Lament" and "Utah Carroll," "Barbara Allen" and several others that are new ones to me. "Cowboy's Lament" was published in *Adventure* for March 10th. "Utah Carroll" will be found in "Cowboy Songs," a compilation by Lomax, published by the Macmillan Co., New York. "Barbara Allen" is an old-timer and may be found in almost all collections of Scottish verse—both words and music. The others are as follows: "The Silver Dagger," "Inchin' Along," and "Old Dan, the Outlaw." If any of you fellows know any of the above, please send 'em in.—ROBERT FROTHINGHAM.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

PUGH, SIDNEY RICHARD. Of the 259th Bn. Canadian Rifles. (C. E. F. Siberia.) Please write to your old pal.—Address KARL JOHN ELMQUIST, 655 E. 7th St., St. Paul, Minn.

JOHN R. If you see this drop a line to an old friend.—Address PVT. GEORGE E. BURNS, Q. M. C. Fort W. Scott, San Francisco, Calif., care of Hdg. A. A.

YOUNG, DERONY. Kindly communicate with your friend immediately.—Address H. W. S., care of *Adventure.*

DENNEHY, TIMOTHY. Left home Sept. 11, 1888. Age 17 years at the time. Have not heard from him since. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. MARY DENNEHY SANBORN, 293 Jackson St., Willimantic, Conn.

DUBOIS, JOE. Born in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Played ball for Belen Team, from 1914 to 1915 Kindly write to me.—Address C. J. DONNELLY, [719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Calif.

SLAVIN, JOS. PATRICK. Race track employee. Born in Australia. Raised in New York. Last heard of was in Elpaso, Texas, April, 1917. Kindly write to me.—Address C. J. DONNELLY, 719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Calif.

BROWN, WM. Age about twenty-six years. Last heard of in Salt Lake City, Utah, in Spring of 1916. Went to live with aunt near Seattle, Wash. Kindly write to me.—Address C. J. DONNELLY, 719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Calif.

CRAFT, FELIX, WERNER. Last heard from about five years ago, was working in Flint, Michigan. Last known address 1018 W. Kersley St. Age about 40 years, height 5 ft. 8½ in. Any information will be appreciated —Address MRS. C. V. NORSEN, 1611 Eighth Ave., Rockford, Ill.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

A COMPLETE list of unclaimed mail will be published in the January 30th and July 30th issues of Adventure.

MYERS, MRS. Last heard of was living at St. Georges Ave., Atlantic City, New Jersey. Any information will be appreciated by her brother.—Address EDWARD MULLEN, 74 Sandal St., Bradford Road, Manchester, England.

TEAGUE, OSCAR R. Formerly of San Francisco, Calif. Last heard of in New York City in 1919. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HARRY BARHAM, 25 Mort St., Lithgow, N. S. W., Australia.

FOSTER, LENORA, MISS. Last heard of in sanitarium in Tennessee, is probably still there, but name of sanitarium is unknown. Any information will be appreciated. —Address Tptr. HENRY C. FOSTER, U. S. M. C. Civilian P. O. Box No. 162, Quantico, Va.

GOODSON, CLARENCE, EUGENE. Age 18 years, brown hair, blue eyes, weight about 160 pounds, 6 feet tall. Formerly with Squadron D., Rockwell Field, Coronado, Calif. Last known to be at Pocatello, Idaho. Supposed to have left in February for Butte, Montana. An anxious mother and father would appreciate any information.—Address MRS. J. L. GOODSON, 1112 Houston Ave., Houston, Texas.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

GATLYN. Last heard of had enlisted in U. S. Army at Arcade, Florida. Was stationed at Carlstorn Field during winter of 1919 and 1920. Any information will be appreciated.—Address M. T., care of *Adventure*.

PARENT, JOE (Bully). Last seen near Grand Rapids, Mich., in July, 1920. Remember the races we used to have? Have been roaming around the country the last fourteen months and would like to get in touch with you again.—Address DAVE H.—Care of *Adventure*.

"RONDO SEADOGO AHOY," "Pop" Polinkas, "Tex" Russell, "Dad" Hodge and any others of the *Rondo* crew; also shipmates of the tugboats *Penobscot*, *Nahant* or *Conestago*, and mates of Co. F. 2nd Ala. Infantry. Please write.—Address BOB FARLEY, 397 Thompson St., Marion, Ohio.

FISHERMAN, ALLEN GONLDA. Lived in Wiarton, Ont. Last heard of was in Toronto. Light hair, medium height, age about sixty years. Any information will be greatly appreciated by his daughter.—Address MRS. CRISSIE CAVAN, 115 Shanley St., Toronto, Ont., Can.

WILLIAMS, CLAUDE. Last heard from during the 4th Liberty Loan Campaign. Was in 10th Inf., as guard of honor at Soldiers and Sailors Monument, Indianapolis, Ind. Dark complexion, age about 25 or 30 years. Any information will be appreciated.—Address No. 446 care of *Adventure*.

BURTON, THOMAS E. Last heard from was in Gloucester, Mass., on tug *Kewabee*. Brown hair, blue eyes, age about 39 years, native of Maine. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address S. MARKLE, 3 Locust Drive, Asbury Park, New Jersey.

TURBUSH, RICHARD (Dick). Last known address 334 Clinton St., Chicago, Ill. Went to Mexico in 1912. Anyone knowing his present address or any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by—Address J. B. C., care of *Adventure*.

O'ROURKE, LARRY. Last heard of in Emerville, Elmira Co., Calif., about 26 years ago; was jockey then. Any information will be appreciated by his brother. —Address DANIEL W. O'ROURKE, 122 Callender St., Baltimore, Md.

THE following have been inquired for in either the August 20th or August 30th issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

ADDISON; Aurthor, B. S.; Barret, Albert; Bauer, C. J.; Bound, John F.; Conklin, Buhl Mr. & Mrs.; Curtis, Jas. R.; Deady, John; Farmer, Frank D.; Finnegan, Joseph Patrick; Gowder, Clarence Milton; Haberly, Francis K. & Dr. S. S.; Harper, Chas. E.; Hoffman, Paul; Johnson, Jefferson Randolph; Kavanagh, Ned & E. E. Egan; Keene, Tom; Marshall, Delia Arnold; Mesecar, Joseph, Alfred; McPeat, Edward George; McIver, Lawrence; Nelson, John (Battler); O'Donnell, Joseph; Olive, Private Dave W.; O'Toole, John William; Outland, Merrit, E.; Quinn, Joseph; Reed, Lucede; Sahlman, Toivo; Smigoski, John M.; Smith, Arthur James (Jim); Smith, James *alias* Nicholas Finley; Stengel, Michael R.; Steinke, Le Roy; Tarply, Thomas E.; Westhaver, P.; Williams, Patrick; Wooding, W. A.; Woodus, T. M.

MISCELLANEOUS—All members of Det. Q. M. C. Fort Clark, Texas, during 1919-1922 are requested to write to one of the old boys; would like to hear from some of his shipmates aboard the S. S. "*Kimta*" after we left Antwerp, Belgium in Dec. 1919; Jerome E. Lane wants to hear from any of the boys who served with Signal Corps in Mexico or at Columbus, New Mexico, during the Punitive Expedition, 1916 and 1917. Or from the boys that served at March Field, Riverside, Calif., during the war, and were there at the time he resigned as Disbursing Clerk.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

SEPTEMBER 20TH ISSUE

Besides the new serial and the two complete novelettes mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE CURE — *G. A. Wells*
White men, natives; and dynamite warfare.

THE TAMING OF "COCKNEY" SKELLY — *Reginald C. Barker*
An unwilling pal holds up the gold-washing.

THE FOX OF ST. JOHN'S — *Bruce Johns*
The bully and the boy fight for a silver fox.

THE GRAY CHARTERIS A Four-Part Story Conclusion — *Robert Simpson*
Red-flecked waters.

AMIGO DEL CHRISTIANO — *F. St. Mars*
Puma ways in the jungles of Latin America.

MAMOTI THE WITCH-WOMAN — *Santie Sabalala*
A South African soothsayer charges high for her services.

GRIGGSEY HELPS OUT — *Gerald Huntoon*
When the submarine sank.

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Make $25 to $50 Week representing Clows' Famous Philadelphia Hosiery, direct from mill—for men, women, children. Every pair guaranteed. Prices that win. Free book "How to Start" tells the story. George Clows Company, Desk 10, Philadelphia, Pa.

Earn Big Money Fast applying gold initials to Autos. Every owner buys—$1.35 profit on $1.50 sale—particulars and samples free. Write quick. Lithogram Co., Dept. 20, East Orange, N. J.

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Live Agents make $10 Day selling Eureka Strainer and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. A. A. Seed Filter Company, 73 Franklin St., New York.

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"If you go you will never return"

MIRSAMEE, the Circassian wife of an American engineer, begged him not to go over the dangerous pass near which bandits lurked; but the old-time daredevil in him urged him on—and he was captured by an Afghan chief who hated him. Condemned to slow torture, he found his cast-iron nerve deserting him as he thought of Mirsamee. Will he be able to save himself this time?

"White Hands Cling" is the name of this powerful story of a woman's softening influence over a man. It was written by Will Levington Comfort and you will find it in

September

Everybody's Magazine

EVERYBODY'S IS FIRST IN FICTION—ON EVERY NEWS-STAND EVERY MONTH